**Remote Consulting (For Lessons of the Week)**

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***5. How can I sound empathic on the phone all day long without wearing myself out?***

Being helpful, calm and patient all day long on the phone can be exhausting. Here are some tips to help us conserve our energy and pace ourselves to get through another busy day on the phone.

* Use the golden minute - let them talk and get it off their chest
* Be prepared to interrupt / guide the conversation if the value of the information starts to dry up, or to deal with the story which starts with “well I first noticed something was wrong in 1949 ….” where you may need to rapidly get them upto the present day with something like “I’m sorry to hear it’s been going on so long, tell me what was it that prompted you / worried you enough to make contact about this today?”
* Try and end your introduction with a positive phrase like “let me talk through what’s been happening so we can see how we can **help**” - if you sound helpful they will be more inclined to comply with your line of enquiry
* Get an early empathic statement in (prepare a few for common scenarios that you encounter, that can be offered almost unconsciously but delivered with meaning without taking too much of your emotional energy) - this is the idea behind “rational compassion” or “cognitive empathy”
* Don’t confuse empathy with pity or sympathy (pity implies your situation is better than theirs and can be condescending)
* Cognitive empathy triggers helpful and thoughtful reactions, whereas emotional empathy can suck the life out of us
* If you sound like you are trying to get out of seeing the patient, or are too busy to see them, they will want to see you even more and the call may end up being more intense than it needs to be
* Similarly, if there is an expectation made early on (for example to be seen, have a visit or xray etc) then acknowledge it and make a commitment to come back to it once you have enough information - if you ignore it they will sense you are trying to avoid giving it to them and will want it even more
* Try to keep your energy levels up till the last word - smiling when you are on the phone makes you sound helpful - so be sure to take a break if you feel yourself flagging
* If you need to check something out (e.g. a dose in the BNF) or the computer crashes, try and give a running commentary of what you are doing rather than leaving a long awkward silence

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