



PLANETREE

## “Bite Sized” Exercises and Discussion Prompts to Reinforce Culture

Below is a collection of discussion prompts and exercises designed to engage the hearts and minds of all members of the team in the practice patient-centered transformation effort. These exercises are designed to be concise enough to be incorporated into brief huddles or team meetings. Specifically, these exercises are designed to:

- Help all members of the team reconnect to the joy of practice
- Re-sensitize them to the patient experience.
- Learn specific techniques for connecting with patients, remaining present and delivering care with compassion – even when it is most difficult to do so.

It is recommended that exercises like these be regularly incorporated into operations as a means of nurturing an understanding of patient-centered care and the responsibility and opportunity for each member of the care team to embody those values.

### Exercises to Understand the Patient Experience

- Trace the path a patient takes from arrival at the office through to registration to the waiting room to the exam room and to check-out. What do they see? What barriers may then encounter? Is the signage they encounter informative? Does the environment (including the signage) convey warmth and compassion? Trace patients’ steps using a walker and/or a wheelchair. Ask yourselves the same questions. *Better yet, do this exercise alongside patient representatives.*
- Pair up with a colleague. Share a brief personal story with your partner (2-3 minutes, does not need to be overly personal). Initially, tell the story with your partner sitting down and you standing up; then both sitting at the same level. Switch roles. Together, identify specific behaviors that created a sense of connection as you shared.
- Role play a typical patient interaction in your exam rooms. Observe how the set-up of the room either facilitates eye contact and personal connection or inhibits it, specifically in consideration of how you use the EHR. Consider placement of the computer screen, availability and height of chairs, etc. *Better yet, complete this exercise alongside patient representatives.*
- Sit in an exam room on the table for 10 minutes, just as a patient would (though they wouldn’t know in advance how long they would be waiting.) Take note of the environment of the exam room. Is there anything to keep you occupied? What can you hear going on outside the room? How does it feel to sit there?

- Review this [“Questions to Ask My Doctor about Patient-Centered Care”](#) tool designed for patients and family members. How well would your office be able to respond to these questions?
- Commitment cards. Each member of the team completes a personal commitment card to commit to a specific behavior/attitude/activity/change they will make to contribute to the office’s culture of patient-centered care.

## Reflections

- Make it a standard practice at any practice meeting to begin by inviting someone to share a patient story. This helps to ground all operational discussions in a common understanding that what matters most is the human dimension of healthcare.
- During a huddle or team meeting, pose this question: How do you want to be remembered by the patients we see today? What can we each do to create those kinds of memories?
- “White Coat Syndrome” is defined as a condition whereby a patient's feeling of anxiety in a medical environment results in an abnormally high reading when their blood pressure is measured. This condition is likely caused by the patient’s anxiety within the physician’s office and in the presence of the physician. *Reflect on the implications that white coat syndrome may have on your ability to deliver the best patient care. Consider ways to minimize patients’ feelings of anxiety or intimidation upon entering your office.*
- Invite each member of the practice team to reflect on and share the reasons they chose a career in healthcare. This can be a powerful dialogue that underscores a common mission among all the members of the office team that supersedes specific roles and responsibilities.
- Invite each member of the team to watch and reflect on these two brief video on empathy:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDWvj\\_g-o8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDWvj_g-o8)
- At a group huddle, brainstorm together specific words and/or behaviors that convey compassion. Identify words and behaviors that convey the opposite.

## Strategies for Remaining Present

- It is can be very easy to become distracted by the demands and pressures of working in a busy practice. But keep in mind that patients sense when their care providers are present and when they may be “going through the motions.” One technique for building self-awareness of being present with patients is to overtly pause before going into the exam room and to use the sensation of the door knob on your hand as a tactile reminder to let distractions go and to enter the room focused in on the patient.
- Ask yourself before entering the exam room, answering the phone or checking in a patient, “How do I want this patient to remember me?” as a way of centering yourself and preparing to engage with the patient and anyone accompanying him/her with compassion, kindness and understanding.