INITIATING THE SESSION

Establishing initial rapport

1. **Greets** patient and obtains patient's name

2. **Introduces** self, role and nature of interview; obtains consent if necessary

3. **Demonstrates respect** and interest, attends to patient's physical comfort

Identifying the reason(s) for the consultation

4. **Identifies** the patient's problems or the issues that the patient wishes to address with appropriate **opening question** (e.g. "What problems brought you to the hospital?" or "What would you like to discuss today?" or "What questions did you hope to get answered today?")

5. **Listens** attentively to the patient's opening statement, without interrupting or directing patient's response

6. **Confirms list and screens** for further problems (e.g. "so that's headaches and tiredness; anything else.....?")

7. **Negotiates agenda** taking both patient's and physician's needs into account

GATHERING INFORMATION

Exploration of patient's problems

8. **Encourages patient to tell the story** of the problem(s) from when first started to the present in own words (clarifying reason for presenting now)

9. **Uses open and closed questioning technique**, appropriately moving from open to closed

10. **Listens** attentively, allowing patient to complete statements without interruption and leaving space for patient to think before answering or go on after pausing

11. **Facilitates** patient's responses verbally and non–verbally e.g. use of encouragement, silence, repetition, paraphrasing, interpretation

12. **Picks up** verbal and non–verbal **cues** (body language, speech, facial expression, affect); **checks out and acknowledges** as appropriate

13. **Clarifies** patient's statements that are unclear or need amplification (e.g. "Could you explain what you mean by light headed")

14. **Periodically summarises** to verify own understanding of what the patient has said; invites patient to correct interpretation or provide further information.

15. **Uses** concise, **easily understood questions and comments**, avoids or adequately explains jargon

16. **Establishes dates and sequence** of events

Additional skills for understanding the patient's perspective

17. Actively **determines and appropriately explores:**
    - patient's **ideas** (i.e. beliefs re cause)
    - patient's **concerns** (i.e. worries) regarding each problem
    - patient's **expectations** (i.e., goals, what help the patient had expected for each problem)
    - effects: how each problem **affects** the patient's life

18. **Encourages patient to express feelings**

PROVIDING STRUCTURE

Making organisation overt

19. **Summarises** at the end of a specific line of inquiry to confirm understanding before moving on to the next section

20. Progresses from one section to another using **signposting, transitional statements**; includes rationale for next section

Attending to flow

21. Structures interview in **logical sequence**

22. Attends to **timing** and keeping interview on task

BUILDING RELATIONSHIP

Using appropriate non-verbal behaviour

23. **Demonstrates appropriate non–verbal behaviour**

- eye contact, facial expression
- posture, position & movement
- vocal cues e.g. rate, volume, tone

24. If reads, writes **notes** or uses computer, does **in a manner that does not interfere with dialogue or rapport**

25. **Demonstrates** appropriate **confidence**

Developing rapport

26. **Accepts** legitimacy of patient's views and feelings; is not judgmental

27. **Uses empathy** to communicate understanding and appreciation of the patient's feelings or predicament; overtly **acknowledges patient's views** and feelings

28. **Provides support**: expresses concern, understanding, willingness to help; acknowledges coping efforts and appropriate self care; offers partnership

29. **Deals sensitively** with embarrassing and disturbing topics and physical pain, including when associated with physical examination

Involving the patient

30. **Shares thinking** with patient to encourage patient's involvement (e.g. "What I'm thinking now is....")

31. **Explains rationale** for questions or parts of physical examination that could appear to be non-sequiturs

32. During **physical examination**, explains process, asks permission

EXPLANATION AND PLANNING

Providing the correct amount and type of information

33. **Chunks and checks:** gives information in manageable chunks, checks for understanding, uses patient's response as a guide to how to proceed

34. **Assesses patient's starting point:** asks for patient's prior knowledge early on when giving information, discovers extent of patient's wish for information

35. **Asks patients what other information would be helpful** e.g. aetiology, prognosis

36. **Gives explanation at appropriate times:** avoids giving advice, information or reassurance prematurely

Aiding accurate recall and understanding

37. **Organises explanation:** divides into discrete sections, develops a logical sequence

38. **Uses explicit categorisation or signposting** (e.g. "There are three important things that I would like to discuss. 1st..." "Now, shall we move on to.")

39. **Uses repetition and summarising** to reinforce information

40. **Uses** concise, **easily understood language**, avoids or explains jargon

41. **Uses visual methods of conveying information:** diagrams, models, written information and instructions

42. **Checks patient's understanding** of information given (or plans made): e.g. by asking patient to restate in own words; clarifies as necessary

Achieving a shared understanding: incorporating the patient's perspective

43. **Relates explanations to patient's illness framework:** to previously elicited ideas, concerns and expectations

44. **Provides opportunities and encourages patient to contribute:** to ask questions, seek clarification or express doubts; responds appropriately

45. **Picks up verbal and non-verbal cues** e.g. patient's need to contribute information or ask questions, information overload, distress

46. **Elicits patient's beliefs, reactions and feelings** re information given, terms used; acknowledges and addresses where necessary

Planning: shared decision making

47. **Shares own thinking as appropriate:** ideas, thought processes, dilemmas

48. **Involves patient** by making suggestions rather than directives

49. **Encourages patient to contribute their thoughts:** ideas, suggestions and preferences

50. **Negotiates** a mutually **acceptable plan**

51. **Offers choices:** encourages patient to make choices and decisions to the level that they wish

52. **Checks with patient** if accepts plans, if concerns have been addressed

CLOSING THE SESSION

Forward planning

53. **Contracts** with patient re next steps for patient and physician

54. **Safety nets**, explaining possible unexpected outcomes, what to do if plan is not working, when and how to seek help

Ensuring appropriate point of closure

55. **Summarises session** briefly and clarifies plan of care

56. **Final check** that patient agrees and is comfortable with plan and asks if any corrections, questions or other items to discuss

OPTIONS IN EXPLANATION AND PLANNING (includes content)

IF discussing investigations and procedures

57. Provides clear information on procedures, eg, what patient might experience, how patient will be informed of results

58. Relates procedures to treatment plan: value, purpose

59. Encourages questions about and discussion of potential anxieties or negative outcomes

IF discussing opinion and significance of problem

60. Offers opinion of what is going on and names if possible

61. Reveals rationale for opinion

62. Explains causation, seriousness, expected outcome, short and long term consequences

63. Elicits patient's beliefs, reactions, concerns re opinion

IF negotiating mutual plan of action

64. Discusses options eg, no action, investigation, medication or surgery, non-drug treatments (physiotherapy, walking aides, fluids, counselling, preventive measures)

65. Provides information on action or treatment offered
    - name
    - steps involved, how it works
    - benefits and advantages
    - possible side effects

66. Obtains patient's view of need for action, perceived benefits, barriers, motivation

67. Accepts patient's views, advocates alternative viewpoint as necessary

68. Elicits patient's reactions and concerns about plans and treatments including acceptability

69. Takes patient's lifestyle, beliefs, cultural background and abilities into consideration

70. Encourages patient to be involved in implementing plans, to take responsibility and be self-reliant

71. Asks about patient support systems, discusses other support available

References:

Kurtz SM, Silverman JD, Draper J (1998) Teaching and Learning Communication Skills in Medicine. Radcliffe Medical Press (Oxford)

Silverman JD, Kurtz SM, Draper J (1998) Skills for Communicating with Patients. Radcliffe Medical Press (Oxford)