Language of Caring for Physicians

QUICK REFERENCE CARDS

Caring Messages Specifically Pertinent During Times of Crisis

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http://languageofcaring.org
This is a uniquely crucial time to serve as a physician or APP, and we acknowledge and honor each of you for your work, your devotion, and the caring you offer as you step forward to care for patients in new and unprecedented ways. You not only are engaged in the daily work of medicine as clinicians, but you also stand as courageous leaders for your own communities and for the world at large. Your steadfastness and strength of heart inspires and humbles all people and invites compliance, admiration, and appreciation. Thank you not only for what you do, but for the way in which you do your good work. You are beacons of hope and caring.

Your commitment to communicating with sensitivity, kindness and caring in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic supports our ongoing shared dedication to person-centeredness and global well-being. We are being asked questions we may not have encountered before and are participating in experiences new to all of us. We are committed to helping make your lives a little easier through supporting you and assisting you with caring communication tools that may be useful, save a little time, and continue to deliver news with caring and kindness.

We offer you examples of caring communication in situations people in healthcare may be encountering today. These are not intended to be scripts but rather as simple examples to help you shape your own authentic messages that demonstrate the depth of your caring and commitment even in trying times. Our hope is that they will serve you and make your work a little easier as you continue to serve others in such commendable ways.

We are grateful and hold you with esteem.
Rules of Thumb

1. Quiet your mind.
2. Take a deep breath. Bring your full attention to the present moment.
4. While the person is speaking: Maintain eye contact. Be quiet. Don’t interrupt.
5. Avoid multitasking (shuffling papers, typing, taking notes, looking at the computer).
6. Resist interruptions by others.
7. Tune in fully.
Personal Spot-Check

With this person, how well did I practice mindfulness?

1. Did I bring my full attention to the present moment and the person in front of me? □ Yes
2. Did I sit, lean in and adopt an open, receptive posture? □ Yes
3. When the person was talking, did I maintain eye contact and listen, without interrupting? □ Yes
4. Did I avoid or resist interruptions? □ Yes
5. Did I remain connected to the person while using my computer or other tech device? □ Yes
6. If family members were present, did I give them my full attention when they were talking? □ Yes

What one thing did I do especially well?

What one thing do I want to do differently to be even more effective?
### Rules of Thumb

#### When Using Technology While With a Person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Guidance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Log in and explain what you’re doing.</td>
<td>“Let’s open up your chart so we have your history and results in front of us.”</td>
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</table>
| 2. Alternate the focus of your attention, instead of trying to multi-task. | - Be mindful to the person and then mindful to the device and back and forth.  
- When you ask a question, make eye contact. Don’t be out of eye contact for more than 10 seconds.  
- When the person is discussing an emotional or critical issue, turn away from device and tune in to the person.  
- When entering information, explain: “Please give me a moment to jot this down while it’s fresh in our minds.” |
| 3. Engage the person with the device and the info on it. | - Turn the screen toward the person, showing there’s no secret.  
- Invite the person to look on with you.  
- Share information, like lab results. |
| 4. Log in and out in front of the person. | You will prevent anxiety about confidentiality. |

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Personal Spot-Check

When Using Technology While With a Person

With this person, how well did I combine use of a technology device with effective communication?

1. Did I log in and out in front of the person, so the person wouldn’t worry about confidentiality? □ Yes

2. Did I alternate my attention between the person and the device, instead of trying to multi-task? □ Yes

3. When I asked a question, did I look at the person while he or she responded? □ Yes

4. If the person was discussing a concern or emotional issue, did I keep my focus on the person? □ Yes

5. Did I invite the person to see what I was writing or reading? □ Yes

What one thing did I do especially well?

What one thing do I want to do differently to be even more effective?
### Rules of Thumb

1. **Use the Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich Technique.**
   - **HEART first:** Address the person’s feelings and anxieties.
   - **Then HEAD:** Address the issue or task at hand. Convey information.
   - **HEART last:** Close on a personal or feeling note.

2. **Acknowledge the person’s feelings.**
   - Read the person’s words and nonverbal cues; reflect back the feeling.
   - Be accepting and nonjudgmental.

3. **Pursue: Follow up on the feeling.**
   - Ask a related question.
   - Try to provide comfort or relief from uncomfortable feelings.

4. **Validate: Legitimize the feeling.**
   - Acknowledge that a challenge is difficult.
   - Suggest that others have had a similar experience.
   - Make a congratulatory or appreciative remark.

5. **Show empathy nonverbally.**
   - Mirror: Match your nonverbal behavior to the other person’s.
   - Adjust your eyes, posture, pace and face to mirror theirs.
Personal Spot-Check

With this person, which best practices did I use?

1. I made sure I connected to the individual as a person. □ Yes
2. I invited the person to share his or her experience and feelings. □ Yes
3. I acknowledged the person’s feelings using words like “you sound” or “you seem… (upset, concerned, relieved, confused)”. □ Yes
4. I validated or confirmed the legitimacy of the person’s feelings. □ Yes
5. I followed up on the feelings expressed. □ Yes
6. I showed empathy in my nonverbal behavior. □ Yes
7. If family members were present, I showed empathy for their feelings too. □ Yes
8. I used the Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich Technique. □ Yes

What did I do well?

What do I want to do differently to be more effective in communicating with empathy?
Situation: Colleague asked to work after expressing not feeling well or possibly being infectious.

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<tr>
<td>Provider is likely feeling fearful, worried, guilty, unsupported</td>
<td>(Name), I am really sorry that you are not feeling well. I imagine that you might be worried about your own health, what that means to you and your family, and about how we are going to manage here without you.</td>
<td>Let’s design a solution that is best for everyone involved. I want all of your coworkers to be protected, and I really want you to be well, feel safe and feel supported.</td>
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Situation: You witness a fellow colleague struggling.

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<td>Provider is likely feeling overwhelmed, consumed, exhausted... You may feel empathetic, concerned, uneasy</td>
<td>I was listening and watching you this morning and it seems like you are not the (Name) I am used to seeing. I am concerned how this situation might be impacting you.</td>
<td>Perhaps talking about it might help. Would you be open to sitting down sometime? I believe that together we can come up with some ideas about how to get through this. It’s a difficult time, and I want to support you.</td>
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Situation: Patient, family member, friend, or colleague asks if it is safe to be around you given that you are in contact with possible COVID-19 patients.

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<td>Person likely feeling afraid, concerned</td>
<td>(Name), it sounds like you are worried that being around me may expose you to the coronavirus. I’m really glad you brought this up. I am taking all precautions to keep myself safe, and by doing that keeping everyone else safe as well. (Describe what you are doing such as following standard precautions, cleaning, etc.) In order to limit exposure, I am practicing physical distancing. Therefore, I will only physically see you if there is an urgent need.</td>
<td>(Patient/Colleague) Let’s talk about what is going on with you and see if we can handle things without being in the same physical space. I want to support you, meet your current needs, and still keep you healthy and safe. (Family/Friend) I’m so grateful we have this way of communicating. I really care about you and want us all to stay safe and connected during this time.</td>
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Situation: A person wants COVID-19 test to return to work. However, tests are not available.

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<td>Person likely to feel irritated,</td>
<td>(Name), I can only imagine how frustrating and concerning it must</td>
<td>Right now, I can offer you a detailed letter that outlines the guidelines and states that, based on your symptoms, you do not qualify for testing. You can share this with your employer so they know you’ve made every effort to comply with their request. These are such unusual times, and I want to make sure you receive all the care you need and that, when the time comes for you to return to work, you can do so knowing you are safe and the people around you are safe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>concerned, apprehensive</td>
<td>be to not be able to be tested right now. Knowing whether you have the</td>
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<td>Coronavirus, or not, would at least give you some answers.</td>
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<td>Unfortunately, these tests are in short supply and are only being</td>
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<td>offered to those whose symptoms meet very specific requirements.</td>
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<td>You feel understanding, frustrated</td>
<td>Fortunately, your symptoms are not at the level that qualifies for</td>
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<td>and powerless</td>
<td>testing. If your symptoms worsen please contact us immediately. We are</td>
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<td>committed to testing everyone who qualifies under the current criteria.</td>
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Situation: Talking with colleagues about their self-isolating from loved ones.

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<td>Provider is likely feeling stressed, fearful, lonely, helpless, exhausted...</td>
<td>This is a difficult time—especially balancing the needs of patients with taking care of yourself and your loved ones at home. I really appreciate all that you are doing. I heard that you’ve chosen to self-isolate away from your family.</td>
<td>I realize that you are trying to do what’s best for everyone during this challenging time, and I suspect that can’t be easy. I’m wondering what kind of toll this is taking on you. Can we talk about what that is like for you and how you are doing? It may help, and I want you to know you are not alone through all of this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You may feel empathetic, concerned</td>
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Communicating with Empathy
**Situation:** Talking to a patient with possible COVID-19.

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<td>Patient is likely to feel anxious, worried, nervous</td>
<td>First, let me say I’m so sorry you’re going through this. I can sense you’re worried or a bit nervous. I imagine you have questions. Knowing what to expect as well as having a plan can help with that. Let’s review what happens next, the precautions needed to keep you and others safe, and I’ll answer your immediate questions.</td>
<td>Then, if you have other questions later you can give us a call. I want you to feel informed, to have a plan, and to know that our whole team is here to support you. Does this sound like a good place to start?</td>
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Situation: Communicating the need to delay an elective procedure due to COVID-19 staffing and PPE limitations.

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<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>(Dr. Name), it sounds like you are really concerned about (patient) and want to provide a good standard of care. I want to work with you to do this as well. This unexpected virus has increased both risk and demand for our space and resources. In response, we are committed to managing this pandemic in the safest manner possible by limiting exposure and risk for patients and preserving PPE resources on behalf of our staff. Therefore, we are moving all procedures that can be delayed to a later time.</td>
<td>Perhaps there are extenuating circumstances which would make this procedure time sensitive. Can you help me understand your concerns? I want to support you and ensure that together we decide the best way to proceed.</td>
</tr>
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<td>likely feeling responsible, determined, empathy for patient</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may feel empathetic, concerned, frustrated</td>
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Language of Caring
FOR PHYSICIANS
delivers efficient tools for sharpening seven evidence-based communication competencies:

- Mindful Practice
- Effective Openings and Closings
- Engaging Patients & Families as Partners
- Collaboration & Teamwork
- Communicating with Empathy
- Effective Explanations
- Hard Conversations

Developed by:
Wendy Leebov, Ed.D., best-selling author and patient experience expert
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