

## HEALTHY LIFESTYLES PATIENT SCENARIOS

Helping patients move toward healthier lifestyle choices can be challenging within the context of a short patient visit. Using effective and efficient techniques for assessing a patient's readiness to change and identifying and overcoming their barriers can be a positive experience for both you and your patients. The **Patient Scenario Cards** can be used by individuals or as part of a group training with all members of your practice to enhance skills that help patients make decisions that result in positive, sustained changes.

### Rethinking the Patient Encounter

The scenarios demonstrate a patient-centered approach in contrast to an advice-giving model. For example, rather than simply providing advice such as "You need to lose 15-20 lbs" or "You should exercise every day" or lecturing a patient "You know smoking is bad for you and you should quit," the focus is on engaging in a dialogue that recognizes the individuality of each patient such as their current lifestyle, environment, beliefs, cultural considerations, etc. You will notice that the scenarios focus on the process and dialogue rather than on the specific recommendations and therefore can be applied to any encounter.



## INSTRUCTIONS

Use the following patient scenarios to enhance the counseling and communication skills of the entire patient care team. Role-playing with clinicians and staff in your practice is a great way to reinforce the concepts. During role-play, “patients” can add details to the scenarios using the Role-Play Examples provided or develop one on their own scenarios. “Clinicians” ask questions and engage the patient in a conversation to uncover motivation, obstacles and other details that might help the patient identify and commit to one or more small changes.

Be sure to review each of the role-play scenarios you conduct. Discuss the different approaches you could take and gather insight from others. Be open to re-thinking the conversations you have with patients about adopting healthier lifestyles. Share your insights and suggestions as a group.

While this activity is most relevant to clinicians, it is important for everyone on the staff to be engaged in this activity. Not only will it allow non-clinical staff to provide their perspective and experience, but it emphasizes their important role in encouraging and assisting patients in this process.

Use these cards to facilitate learning. Organize an in-service training (possibly held over lunchtime) for clinicians and support staff that include discussion and role playing. Plan to revisit this activity periodically to reinforce and build on the concepts.

### **Keep the following in mind:**

- One size does not fit all. Each patient encounter is different so experiment with different techniques.
- Communication is the key. Have a two-way conversation that actively involves the patient.
- Express empathy. Be willing to share your own successes and struggles about making lifestyle changes.
- Assess whether the patient is ready to make any changes — or is even considering it (readiness to change). When you sense resistance, it typically means you are ahead of the patient’s readiness so take one step back to where the patient is.
- Assess the patient’s confidence about making a change (self efficacy). Some will be ready and confident while others will need coaching.
- Assist the patient in setting specific goals. Work together to determine what they are ready and willing to do and within what timeframe.
- Be realistic. Encourage the patient to choose incremental changes to achieve both short-term and long-term benefits.
- Review and repeat. This is intended to be an ongoing conversation woven through future visits.
- It is normal for the patient to experience both success and challenges. Encourage them to view their challenges as learning opportunities rather than failures.