USE EHR "STICKY NOTES" TO CONNECT WITH PATIENTS PERSONALLY

One of the privileges of being a family physician is establishing lifelong relationships with patients and the continuity of care that provides. It takes multiple visits to form a bond and gain their trust, especially when they are suffering from multiple comorbidities and have lost faith in the medical

system. Although electronic health records (EHR) have a reputation for interfering with the doctor-patient relationship, our practice's EHR has a feature that I now use to enhance my bond with patients.

Our system gives clinicians the option to jot down personal notes or reminders for individual patients. We can get as creative as we desire with this "sticky note" feature. I use it to enter various personal notes, such as the names of patients' kids, best friends, siblings, or pets; if they've had a recent change in living arrangement; the loss of a loved one; or if they have something joyful coming up that they're excited about, like a trip. It could be anything they share with me in the lighter moments of our conversation. Once I enter these reminders, they display on my screen every time I log in to the patient's record in the EHR. No chart review is needed.

It makes patients feel special when I ask them about something they have previously shared with me that is not related to their health, but is from their personal life. These small things bring the personal touch and humanity into the practice of medicine, which helps establish rapport. It's a simple thing that can help us connect with our patients and experience the joy of practicing family medicine.

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TALKING YOUR TEAM THROUGH A CRISIS

COVID-19 has caused major disruptions for medical practices and their communities, and it may cause more if the pandemic resurges in the coming months. During times of crisis, these steps can help physicians communicate effectively with their teams and calm nerves.

1. **Pause and breathe.** Your team members take emotional cues from you, so if you're clearly feeling anxious, they will too. Take a moment to calm yourself before communicating, whether in person or by phone or email.

2. **Put yourself in their shoes.** What would you want to know right now if you were them? What would be your concerns or questions?

3. **Do your research.** Communication is important in a crisis situation, but spreading misinformation is worse than spreading no information at all. Make sure that what you're telling your team comes from credible sources, and share those sources so people can see for themselves that the information is reliable.

4. **Speak clearly and confidently.** You can speak confidently even amid some uncertainty by using language like "We're still evaluating data, but what we understand so far is this …" Then follow up regularly even if it's just to say that you're still seeking definitive answers.

5. **Have specific next steps.** Tell your team members what concrete steps you and your organization are taking, and tell them what tangible steps *they* can take in the days ahead.

Source: Shapira A. How to reassure your team when the news is scary. *Harvard Business Review*. March 5, 2020. Accessed June 10, 2020. https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-to-reassure-your-team-when-the-news-is-scary

GET CREDIT FOR PRE- AND POST-EXAM WORK

Patients often complain that doctors don't spend enough time with them — that visits are too short. What they often aren't aware of is the time the doctor spends on their care before and after the face-to-face examination portion of the visit.

To "get credit" for this prep time and wrap-up time, physicians can make a simple change in their workflow: review lab results and other patient information in front of patients, and dictate notes, letters, etc., in front of them too. Not only does this approach lead to expedient completion of all the work for each patient, but it helps patients realize the added time their physician spends on their care.

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