

Why Don't People Change Behavior?

What makes behavior change such an uphill climb? A survey conducted by Dr. Susan Butterworth at the Oregon Health and Science University revealed some eye-opening results. Seven reasons were:

They don't think it's important.
They don't think they can.
They aren't ready for it.
Their values don't support it.
They don't have a good plan.
They lack adequate social support.
They haven't worked through their ambivalence about it.

What wasn't on the list? Lack of Knowledge....

As clinicians, we've been trained to be the healthcare experts in evidence-based clinical interventions that generally yield best outcomes. Thus, we feel compelled to impart this knowledge to the patient/family. We do the talking; they do the listening.

So, this begs the question: What should clinicians be doing or doing differently to foster improved health behavior as opposed to always "telling" or "directing" our patients/families what to do?

Dr. William Miller in his life's work and continued research in Motivational Interviewing since the early 1980s shows us that people don't change behavior, not because they don't appreciate the downside of their condition or situation, but because they feel at least two ways about it. It's the *ambivalence* that keeps them stuck where they are.

Ambivalence sounds like this:

"I don't mind exercise, but I'm just too tired when I get off work."
"I would take a vaccine, but I'm afraid about the possible side effects".
"I would do better with my insulin, but I don't like giving myself the shot."

It's the "but" in the middle, as Dr. Miller calls it, that keeps people stuck, preventing change.

Traditionally, healthcare providers weren't trained in the use of these MI conversational skills because these skills were in the Behavioral Health domain. Now, these evidence-based conversational skills have made their way to the medical side so clinicians can engage the patient and family in a more effective and meaningful way.

A nursing colleague who is taking NSHC's Health Coach Certification program mentioned to me recently, "While studying motivational interviewing, I realized what had happened between me and my spouse. He has a heart condition and of course I've been "on him" about staying on his diet, getting enough exercise, taking his medications in a timely manner... when one day he asked me", "I know what to do...When are you ever going to ask me about me?"

Only telling the patient what to do has simply fallen short...

For a moment, consider your conversations with patients/clients. Is it about our clinical agenda and subject matter or the patient and family's concerns about their health within the social context of their daily lives? We now have evidence-based conversational skills and research that supports a new approach to engage the patient and family as a true 50/50 partner in health, improving both health and satisfaction... Evidence-based Health Coaching!

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For details on health coach certification offered to clinicians exclusively through *The National Society of Health Coaches*, visit us: www.nshcoa.com , email us: info@nshcoa.com , or call toll free 888-838-1260.

