

UNIT 1

DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

"Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much."

—Blaise Pascal, mathematician, physicist (1623–1662)



In a waiting room

* Pre-reading Question

Have you ever had any bad experiences when seeing a doctor?

* Reading



Ms. Taylor managed to get into the doctor's office 10 minutes before 6:00 P.M., the closing time. It was her first visit to this doctor, since her family doctor happened to be away. One patient was about to leave, having paid her bill, and there was no one else in the waiting room. She was glad that she would be seen immediately.

The nurse told her that the doctor had just stepped out, but that it would not be long before he would return. As she was waiting, another patient rushed in and joined her in the waiting room. Ms. Taylor had a high fever, a runny nose, and a cough.

After 20 minutes, Ms. Taylor asked the nurse what time the doctor would be back.

“Soon,” said the nurse.

Another 20 minutes passed.

“Does the doctor know that patients are waiting for him?” asked Ms. Taylor.

“Yes,” said the nurse. “He just called to say that he was on his way.”

Feeling much relieved, Ms. Taylor waited, but the doctor only came back a little after 7 o’clock. He abruptly came in from the front door and said,

“Patients still waiting?!”

He quickly walked past Ms. Taylor in the waiting room without a glance or a word, and went into the consultation room. Ms. Taylor was called at last.

“So, what’s the problem?”

The doctor asked her about her symptoms, listened to her chest, checked her throat in haste, and said,

“I will prescribe you some medicine. OK? Take care. Bye.”

And that’s it?! Ms. Taylor was puzzled. She had to ask for the diagnosis herself.

“Doctor, uh, do I have the flu?”

“What else could it be?” he replied.

How should I know? Ms. Taylor was about to retort but she did not. How can he be sure that I have the flu and not just a bad cold? Why does he not test samples of respiratory secretions to identify the flu? Our family doctor always does it before prescribing antibiotics. She was out of the doctor’s office in one minute. She felt as if she had been thrown out. She was disappointed and angry.

* Comprehension

- When did the doctor step out of his clinic? Around what time?
- How long did Ms. Taylor have to wait after all? How many patients were waiting before her?
- What did the doctor say to Ms. Taylor as he walked past her in the waiting room?
- After the examination, what did the doctor say to Ms. Taylor? Did he tell her the diagnosis?
- How much time did the doctor spend to examine Ms. Taylor?

* Discussion in Class (Useful expressions can be found on p. 86.)

- 1 Why was Ms. Taylor disappointed and angry?
- 2 What could the doctor have done or said to establish a better relationship with the patient? Express your opinion using the following expressions:
 - He could (should) have . . .
 - If he had . . . , the patient / nurse could (would) have . . .

When	“He could have . . .”
Before going out	
While he was out	
Walking past the waiting room	
On seeing the patient	

- 3** How can you enrich the doctor-patient relationship? What is important? What can hinder doctor-patient communication? Discuss with your classmates.

What is important	What can hinder communication

* Expand Your Horizons — Make a Presentation

(Information on making presentations can be found on p. 87.)

- + Find an article/research paper/report/review related to the issue discussed in this unit.
- + Present it in class—read and ask questions on the major points, check the vocabulary, discuss the issue, etc.

SOME EXAMPLE TOPICS OF INTEREST

- Courses (education) offered at universities in various countries with the objective of developing better doctor-patient relationships
- Differences in “patient rights” statements by hospitals around the world
- Measures taken in hospitals to enhance doctor-patient relationships (system, dress code, education, etc.)
- Development of “family medicine” in various countries—different concepts of a “family doctor”
- Health care systems around the world—the different ways people receive health care and pay for medical care, etc.
- Influenza pandemics—outbreaks, preventions, and ways of treatment

* English for Medicine

—Patient-centered approach to history taking—

- 1** Think of better expressions for **1–5** that will help establish a better relationship with the patient. (*use of words / timing / patient’s condition / attitude, etc.)



(Ms. Taylor had been waiting for 30 minutes.)

Doctor: **1** Next, please! Hello, Ms. Taylor. What’s the matter today?

Ms. Taylor: I have this terrible stomachache. It must be the raw oysters I had for...

Doctor: **2** Raw oysters!? People often get food poisoning from them. Where did you eat them?

Ms. Taylor: At home. Well, I bought them at the new supermarket just...

Doctor: Alright, so you had raw oysters at home. How’s the pain now?

Ms. Taylor: Well, it comes and goes, but when it comes, it is really painful. I can’t stand it. It’s agony. Ah, here it comes... (She is in pain.)

Doctor: **3** Show me the place.

Ms. Taylor: Uh... Uh...

Doctor: **4** Where is it? Where?

Ms. Taylor: Well... it’s around here...

Doctor: **5** Is it like a stabbing pain? What about diarrhea?

Ms. Taylor: Uh....

- 2** Now listen to the following dialogue and fill in the blanks. Notice how the doctor uses open-ended questions. Practice the dialogue in pairs.



Doctor: Next, please! Hello, Ms. Taylor.

I'm _____.

What _____?

Ms. Taylor: I have this terrible stomachache. It must be the raw oysters I had for lunch yesterday.

Doctor: Could you _____?

Ms. Taylor: Well, I ate about a dozen of them. I bought them at the new supermarket that just opened in our neighborhood.

Doctor: I see. Have you _____?

Ms. Taylor: No, I don't think so.

Doctor: Can you _____?

Ms. Taylor: It started around 4 in the afternoon. It comes and goes, but when it comes, it's really painful. I can't stand it. It's agony. Ah, here it comes...

Doctor: Can you _____?

Ms. Taylor: Uh... Uh...

Doctor: Would you _____?

Ms. Taylor: Yes... it's really painful around here...

Doctor: Around here. What kind _____?

Ms. Taylor: Uh...