



the journal *Cancer Prevention and Control* is publishing a supplement on communication skills early in 1999.

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References

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I was pleased to see that the Oct. 6 issue of *CMAJ* focused on the role of clinical teachers in the education of medical students.¹ The recent Educating Future Physicians for Ontario project identified a number of roles to which medical students can aspire during their training. The role of effective communicator, which entails being sensitive to the needs of patients, is one of these. On entry into medical school, students are often unprepared to deal with the complex health issues, both physical and psychological, that affect a patient's life. Having an empathetic instructor who

delivers patient-centred care can be both educational and inspirational.

Victor Neufeld² asks "what more can be done by the medical community in Canada" to address the issue of doctor-patient communication. There is something that medical students can do. During the first few years of undergraduate medicine, clinical teachers appointed by the faculty instruct students both in lectures and in the hospital setting. Students are often asked to evaluate their clinical instructors in terms of level of knowledge, approachability and other characteristics. However, there should be an opportunity for students to identify those physicians who exemplify patient-centred care. I recently passed on an evaluation to a course coordinator praising an orthopedic surgeon who took the time to address the needs of his patients. While teaching us how to treat basic orthopedic problems, he was also

teaching us how to look at the whole person, not just "the case." I hope that my evaluation will encourage the faculty to ask this surgeon to return as an instructor.

It is becoming increasingly important for medical students to take part in their education. Evaluating clinical teachers and commenting positively when a teacher displays humanistic qualities is one way to address this "educational challenge."

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CMAJ index • L'index du JAMC

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