



## LETTERS

## LISTENING TO PATIENTS IS NOT ENOUGH

# Listening is key, but ask the right questions

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Sokol tells a poignant tale,<sup>1</sup> but the message from this tragic case is precisely the opposite of how its title is phrased. Listening is key: ask someone why they sought advice from healthcare providers, and listen to the answer. Learning sets of questions and firing them at patients risks not asking the right question and not listening to the answer, because the clinician's entire focus is on asking and not listening.

Listening for cues—dissatisfaction with a management plan; a sense that patients or parents have not been reassured—is more important than learning a set of questions. The important aspect is not which questions are asked but how answers are elicited.

The skill lies not in learning a list of questions but in asking the right kinds of questions.

The moral of the story would have been better phrased, “Asking focused questions is not enough, and if you're listening you may find out why.”

Competing interests: None declared.

1 Sokol D. Listening to patients is not enough. *BMJ* 2017;358:j2670. doi:10.1136/bmj.j2670 PMID:28576868.

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