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***Corresponding author:** Mohamed B Rashed, FRCSI,
Professor, Libyan Board of Orthopedics, Tripoli, Libya,
E-mail: mohbrashed@gmail.com

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Editorial

The Imperative of Communication Skills in Modern Healthcare: A Contemporary Editorial

Mohamed B Rashed*

Libyan Board of Orthopedics, Tripoli, Libya

Introduction

Communication remains a cornerstone of clinical practice, but its scope has evolved dramatically in the last decade. Modern healthcare now integrates telemedicine, digital records, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and cross-cultural care into everyday clinical interactions. Effective communication is therefore not merely interpersonal—it is increasingly technological, interprofessional, and global in nature. Failures in communication continue to account for a significant proportion of adverse events, misdiagnoses, and patient dissatisfaction [1,2]. In this rapidly changing landscape, clinicians must understand and apply updated communication strategies to ensure safe, equitable, and patient-centered care.

Communication at the core of clinical practice

Clear clinician–patient interaction facilitates accurate diagnoses, shared decision-making, and adherence to treatment plans [1]. Active listening remains central, but modern practice extends this to digital platforms—requiring the ability to interpret non-verbal cues in video consultations and manage hybrid communication channels such as electronic health records (EHRs) and patient portals. Studies show that well-structured communication via EHR messaging improves patient engagement and reduces medication errors [3].

Digital healthcare communication: Telemedicine, AI, and EHRs

The expansion of telehealth since 2015, especially following

the COVID-19 pandemic, has transformed how clinicians communicate.

- Teleconsultation best practices emphasize visual framing, deliberate pauses, confirmation of understanding, and explicit safety-netting [4].
- AI-assisted communication tools, including automated triage and symptom checkers, can improve information flow but risk depersonalization if not supervised by clinicians [5].
- EHR-mediated communication, including structured handoffs and shared documentation, reduces duplication and enhances continuity, but requires training to avoid cognitive overload [6].

Digital literacy is now a clinical competency. Clinicians must know how to maintain rapport across a screen, ensure privacy in virtual visits, and manage hybrid communication workflows.

Empathy as a clinical tool: Mechanisms and modern applications

Empathy continues to predict improved clinical outcomes, treatment adherence, and patient satisfaction [7]. The mechanisms include:

- Reducing patient anxiety by activating prefrontal regulatory pathways.

- Enhancing trust, which strengthens disclosure of sensitive symptoms.
- Increasing perceived clinician competence.
- Improving emotional regulation, particularly in pediatric or palliative settings [8].

Evidence demonstrates that empathetic communication during teleconsultations remains effective when deliberate verbal validation replaces lost non-verbal cues [9].

Culturally sensitive communication in diverse and LMIC settings

In multicultural and low- and middle-income country (LMIC) contexts, culturally tailored communication is essential. Examples from LMIC settings, including North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, show that:

- Trust-building is often facilitated by family-inclusive discussions.
- Patients may prefer narrative explanations over biomedical terms.
- Religious and cultural values strongly influence treatment decisions [10].

In aging populations, clinicians must adapt communication strategies to cognitive, sensory, and emotional needs.

Standardized interpreter protocols, such as the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) standards, reduce miscommunication and ensure accuracy. Professional interpreters outperform ad-hoc family interpreters, lowering medical error rates [11].

Interprofessional communication and Safety: Beyond SBAR

Communication failures among healthcare teams remain a major cause of sentinel events [12]. While SBAR is widely used, it has limitations in high-stress and time-sensitive contexts, such as trauma or critical care. Enhanced models include:

- ISBARR (Introduce–Situation–Background–Assessment–Recommendation–Read-back), which incorporates verification loops [13].
- SBAR-T, adding “Thank you” and a structured closure to reduce ambiguity in busy settings [14].

Evidence shows these models improve accuracy, reduce near-misses, and enhance collaboration.

Simplifying complex information for patients

Health literacy challenges remain universal. Effective strategies include:

- Plain-language explanations.
- Visual decision aids.

- The teach-back method—a proven tool for validating comprehension [15].

Digital tools, including animations and multilingual patient portals, enhance clarity and accessibility.

Ethical considerations in modern communication

Modern communication requires explicit attention to ethics, particularly as digital tools expand the boundaries of clinical interaction.

1. Safeguarding patient privacy: Clinicians must ensure confidentiality during telemedicine visits, encrypted messaging, and electronic record exchanges [16].

2. Informed consent in vulnerable populations: Extra care must be taken when communicating with cognitively impaired, pediatric, or linguistically disadvantaged patients. Consent processes must be adapted for virtual settings and include verification of understanding [17].

3. Managing conflicts of interest: AI-driven tools and digital platforms may be influenced by commercial algorithms. Transparency regarding data use, sponsorship, and decision-support tools is required to maintain trust [18].

Toward a healthcare culture that prioritizes communication

Communication training must evolve from optional soft-skills workshops to structured competency programs. Simulation, video review, interprofessional debriefings, and structured feedback models are proven to improve communication efficacy [19]. Organizations should foster environments that encourage open dialogue, psychological safety, and team learning.

Conclusion

Modern healthcare demands updated, evidence-based communication strategies that integrate digital skills, cultural competence, and ethical rigor. Effective communication remains a clinical instrument essential to diagnosis, safety, and patient experience. By embracing contemporary tools—telemedicine, AI, structured frameworks, and culturally attuned practices—clinicians can deliver equitable, high-quality, patient-centered care in an increasingly complex global health landscape.

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