



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### STUDENTS OPINIONS ON FACTORS AFFECTING DOCTOR AND PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** In today's fast pace world, there is a greater need in building an effective doctor patient relationship, as patients also tend to expect more than just regular check-up sessions and demand a more holistic medical experience comprising of good doctor-patient relationship.

**Objective:** To investigate students' opinion on which factor is the most essential in building a good doctor-patient relationship

**Method:** The study design for this study is cross-sectional study. Data was collected from 500 students via the prepared questionnaire and was scored using a scale from 1 to 5. Results were tabulated and analyzed.

**Result:** Majority of students think that communication skills (87.65%) is the most important factor to establish a good doctor-patient relationship, followed by appearance (86.52%), manners (82.45%) and understanding (76.30%).

**Conclusion:** Doctors communication and interpersonal skills encompass the ability to gather information in order to facilitate accurate diagnosis, counsel appropriately, give therapeutic instructions, and establish caring relationships with patients.

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## INTRODUCTION

The doctor patient relationship is a complex concept in the medical sociology in which patients voluntarily approach a doctor and thus become a part of a contract in which they tend to abide with the doctor's guidance. (Banerjee and Sanyal, 2012; Lejoyeux, 2011) As stated by many studies the most important factors affecting doctor-patient relationship include communication skill, manners and understanding patients. (Roter and Hall, 1989; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Losh et al., 2005) A good doctor-patient relationship is the crucial determinant for a better clinical outcome and satisfaction with the patients, irrespective of the socio-cultural determinants. (Adler, 2002; Wagner et al., 2002; Werther, 2010) A poor doctor-patient relationship has been proved to be a major obstacle for both doctors and patients, and has eventually affected the quality of healthcare and ability of the patients to cope with their illness. (Losh et al., 2005; Wagner et al., 2002) Li Y. (Siebzechner et al., 2008) has highlighted about the poor doctor patient relationship in China. Due to a rapid increase in population,

health care reformation began in the early 1990s and since then relationships between physicians and patients began to change. The study reports that the relationships have become violent. Often a number of physicians and hospital staff have been injured. It is because a physician meets 50-60 patients before noon in Chinese hospitals, which leaves no time for discussion and thus lesser communication and listening. In turn, patients show low level of satisfaction towards the doctors. Both the statements above reveal that patients require a good communication environment when they are seeking for medical advice. A few studies have also stated that although physicians maybe experts on the medical facts of a patient's condition, those facts are never sufficient to specify a course of treatment; clinical decisions must always include consideration of the values and preferences of the patient. (Losh et al., 2005; Siebzechner et al., 2008) The relationship between patients and doctors is also at the core of medical ethics, serving as an anchor for many of the most important debates in the field. Some studies have suggested that, doctor-patient relationship plays an important role in the final outcome and quality of life of the patient. Hence multiple measures such as training sessions on communication skills for the doctors, sensitizing clinicians to respond to patients emotional cues, encouraging doctors to communicate without/with minimal use of medical

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terminologies, facilitating feedback from the patients after consultation, accelerating the empowerment of the patients, training of doctor-patient communication skills be included in the undergraduate medical curriculum, reverting back to the traditional culture to negate the socio-cultural determinants, promoting listening by the doctors, involving family members and enabling adoption of newer approach have been proposed to make a correct diagnosis, enhance healing and boost the doctor-patient relationship. (Losh *et al.*, 2005; Adler, 2002; Siebzehner *et al.*, 2008)

## Objectives

To investigate students' opinions on which factor is the most essential in building a good doctor patient relationship. Our main objective in conducting this research is to gather information on the awareness of students towards factors affecting doctor and patients relationship. Before becoming a doctor, medical students should be able to know at least some minimum values to implement not just in their pre-clinical posting but also throughout their entire life. This is to help regulate patients' emotions, facilitate comprehension of medical information, and allow for better identification of patients' needs, perceptions, and expectations in order to provide excellent medical services.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was designed to assess the students' opinions on which factor is the most essential in building a good doctor patient relationship. The sample size for our study was 500 students who were undergoing the MBBS course. It is non-specific on which year or phase they are, as we only aim to find out what do the students think on the factors affecting doctor-patient relationship. Data was collected from 500 students via the prepared questionnaire. The data was scored using a scale from 1 to 5.

### Answering method :

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 3- Uncertain
- 4- Agree
- 5- Strongly Agree

Results were tabulated and analyzed using bar charts.

## RESULTS

The various factors that were assessed in our study based on the questionnaire include: Appearance, communication skills, manner and understanding. The results were tabulated as follows.

The percentage score explains the degree of importance of the factor above based on the participant's opinion (x axis) and the percentage of students responding to the particular score (y axis).Based on the above results, a large number of students believe that appearance is important in maintaining a good doctor-patient relationship with 60.1% percent of participants

giving a score of 100% (most important).On the other extreme 3.89% of individuals giving a score of 40%. (Fig. 1) Thus it is important to learn that most participants believe that appearance is an important factor. The percentage score explains the degree of importance of the factor above based on the participant's opinion (x axis) and the percentage of students responding to the particular score (y axis). Based on the above results, a large number of students believe that appearance is important in maintaining a good doctor-patient relationship with 59.47% percent of participants giving a score of 100% (most important).On the other extreme 1.91% of individuals giving a score of 40%. (Fig 2) Thus it is important to learn that most participants believe that appearance is an important factor.

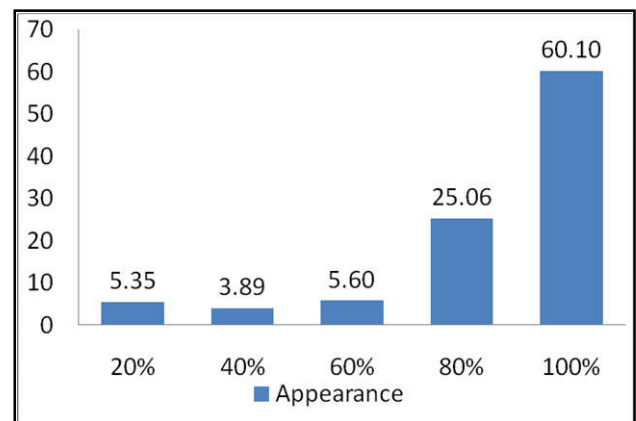


Figure 1. Percentage of Students' opinion on the importance of doctor's appearance

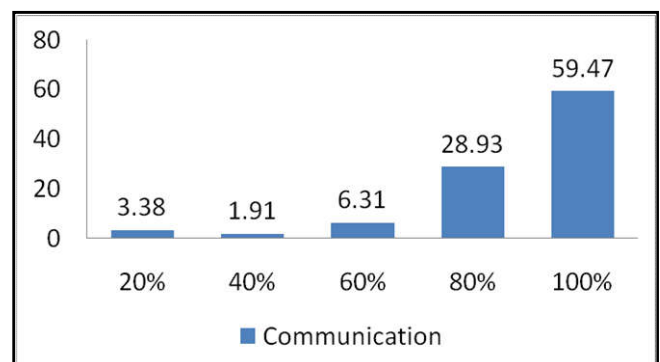


Figure 2. Percentage of Students' opinion on the importance of doctor's communication skills

The percentage score explains the degree of importance of the factor above based on the participant's opinion (x axis) and the percentage of students responding to the particular score (y axis).Based on the above results, a large number of students believe that appearance is important in maintaining a good doctor-patient relationship with 43.07% percent of participants giving a score of 100% (most important).On the other extreme 2.74% of individuals giving a score of 20%.(Fig 3) Thus it is important to learn that most participants believe that appearance is an important factor.

The percentage score explains the degree of importance of the factor above based on the participant's opinion (x axis) and the

percentage of students responding to the particular score (y axis).Based on the above results, a large number of students believe that appearance is important in maintaining a good doctor-patient relationship with 34.55% percent of participants giving a score of 80%. On the other extreme, 3.41% of individuals giving a score of 20%. (Fig 4) Thus it is important to learn that most participants believe that appearance is an important factor.

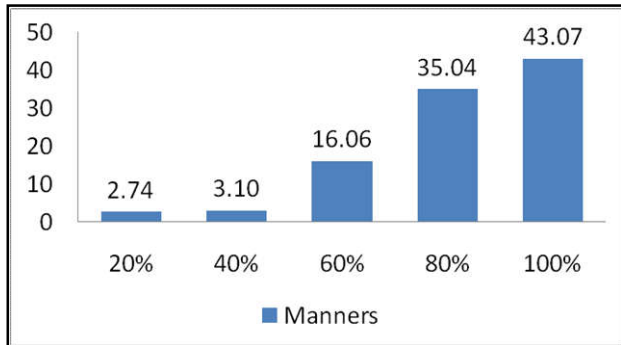


Figure 3. Percentage of Students' opinion on the importance of doctor's manners

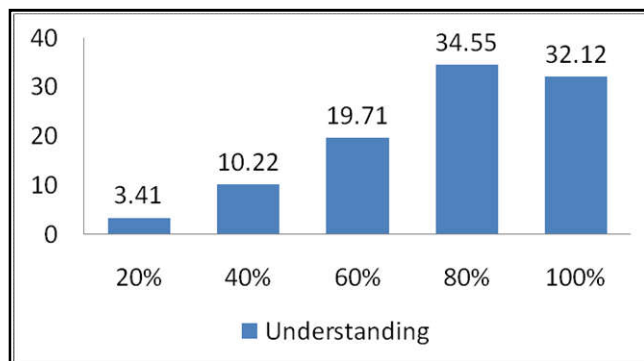


Figure 4. Percentage of Students' opinion on the importance of understanding towards the patients

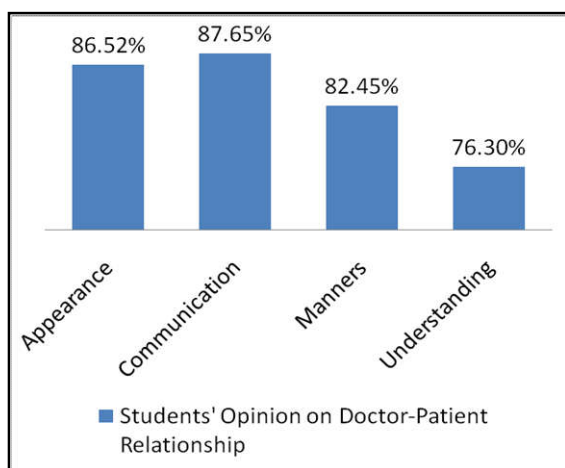


Figure 5. Percentage of Students' Opinion on Factors Affecting Doctor-Patient Relationship

In summary, the above chart shows that most of the students give a score of 87.65% for communication in attributing its degree of importance among four factors. On the other hand,

fewer students think that factor of understanding patients' perspectives is least important, where it has 76.30%. (Fig 5)

## DISCUSSION

In the present study, communication is the most important factor in maintaining a good doctor patient relationship. This is further enhanced by Banerjee A and Sanyal D<sup>1</sup> who claim that one third to one half of patients will not follow physician treatment recommendation thus labeling them as non-compliance implicitly supporting an idea of paternalism that doctors know best. Better doctor-patient communication can prevent such situations thus promoting a more refined two way understanding. Lejoyeux (2011) also reinforces the good communication skill between physicians and patients. Another factor that plays a role is appearance of a doctor which is the second important criteria, which is 86.52% and this is followed by good manners, which has 82.45%.This point is further supported by Roter *et al.* (1989) who claim that manners can help in reducing the stress that a patient experiences during a medical visit and thus better manners and a proper presentation could improve doctor patient relationship, On a separate note he also expressed the importance of communication skills to boost better understanding and relationship. Lastly, 76.30% of the students feel that understanding patients' perspective is least important compared to the other three. There are certain reasons to explain that why students choose communication as the most significant factor in building a good doctor-patient relationship. Doctors can obtain more information from the patients if they are able to communicate well with their patients. Furthermore, a good greeting can help to build up patients' confidence when they receive the medical care. Hence, doctors can approach the patients' need more easily. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that a well-communicated doctor can make sure the suitability of treatment to the patients as well as everything is gone well. However, we cannot deny that understanding patients' perspective is not necessary although it has the lowest percentage among four. This point is further enhanced by Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2013) who claims that it is important for doctors to maintain a good understanding of the patient and understand their innate need for emotional companionship, however she also claims that the fundamental paradox of clinical intimacy always exists. It is equally essential to understand and know the patients' emotion and feeling so that the doctors can provide the best treatment to the patients. The statistics we obtained reflect the students' opinion on what they emphasized in their future career. Hence, this can be a reference for the students in order to improve themselves as they are undergoing a clinical posting. In the future, they can become more understanding as they are providing the medical care for their patients.

## Conclusion

Thus as to conclude, it is important to stress that this report is based on the study that has been conducted over a given period of time of 3 months and a sample of average of 500 participants. Differences on thought regarding this topic may vary in other places and time. Thus however, based on our research it is found that communication plays a pivotal role in ensuring a good doctor- patient relationship which has 87.65%.

Other factors that contribute to this regard are appearance (86.52%), manners (82.45%) and the understanding that the doctor has for his/her patient (76.30%). From the research, we note that doctor's communication and interpersonal skills encompass the ability to gather information in order to facilitate accurate diagnosis, counsel appropriately, give therapeutic instructions, and establish caring relationships with patients. The objective of the research has coincided with the results obtained where an appropriate communication integrates both patient- and doctor-centered approaches.

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## Questionnaire

### Batch 34, MMMC (MBBS)

Members Names : Lee Mun Chin, SiveShangkery, Illiya Aziz, Soh Siew Moon

**This study is based on preliminary research done by our group. This is based on individual opinion, the subjects confidentiality is not compromised during this study duration. Your full cooperation is much appreciated**

1. Kindly tick the column which you think is the most suitable statement. Answer should be based on your opinion in which factor is important to build your relationship between you and your patients in future.

Answering method : 1- Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Uncertain 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

2. Please tick Yes or No for the following statements.

Statement	Yes	No
a) Doctor should identify the problem/ issues using open questions		
b) Doctor must maintain posture or a distance between patients		
c) Doctor should put up a proper facial expression when dealing with the patients		
d) Doctor should use plain language		
e) Physician should explore influence of patient's problem or disease on his / her life.		

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