

Distance medicine

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Educational objectives:

Residents will

1. Understand the underlying reasons patients contact their doctors between appointments
2. Understand the evolving role of technology in distal patient communication
3. Practice and improve skills in phone interviewing
4. Know what to expect while providing phone coverage

Case 1

Dr. J.: Mr. H., I have your results. We can talk now or you can come to the office.

Mr. H.: Now would be great!

Dr. J.: Everything was normal except the hepatitis C test . . . it was positive.

Mr. H.: What does this mean?

Mr. H. listened to Dr. J.'s description and had no questions. When he came to the office a few weeks later, his fists were clenched.

Dr. J.: You look anxious.

Mr. H.: I haven't slept in weeks.

Mr. H. adds that he couldn't speak freely during the call; his children were in the room.

Questions:

1. What could Dr. J have done differently to optimize this encounter?

Case 2

Mrs. G., a 78-year-old talkative widow with severe osteoarthritis calls Dr. N. reporting diarrhea since the prior night. After assessing her symptoms, Dr. N. tells Mrs. G. that she probably has a stomach flu.

Mrs. G.: (silent for a moment) ... oh ...

Dr. N.: You'll probably feel better within a day, but just in case, you should probably go to the emergency room tonight. If you don't go, make sure to drink plenty of fluids. Can you repeat back what I just said?

Mrs. G.: You want me to go to the hospital, but if I don't go, to ... what was that again?

Dr. N.: To drink plenty of fluids.

Questions:

1. What did Dr. N do well during this encounter?
2. What could Dr. N have done better?

Case 3

Dr. R.: ... I didn't understand the question—can you repeat it?

Mr. B.: (mumbles unintelligibly) ...

Dr. R.: I'm having trouble understanding you. I'm going to ask you to come to the office in the morning to see your regular doctor.

Dr. R. learns the next day that Mr. B. had been admitted to a hospital with anaphylaxis to a new medication.

Questions:

1. What could Dr. R have done during an encounter like this?