

# What Matters to You?

## Unmasking Communication During a Pandemic

### Non-Verbal Communication

- Be mindful and present
- Maintain eye contact
- Use gestures and facial expressions
- Smile with your eyes
- Pay attention to the person's body language
- Be aware of power imbalance

### Written and Digital Solutions

- Use team member identification boards
- Inquire and accommodate for sensory needs
- Use visual aids and technology
- Provide high-quality wi-fi
- Have technology available for loan

### Verbal communication

- Introduce yourself
- Make it a human encounter by acknowledging the situation and restrictions
- Keep people informed
- Perform an audio check
- Ask for feedback
- Provide translation services
- Ask "What Matters to You?"
- Speak slowly, loudly or more deeply
- Validate and legitimize feelings

*Disclaimer: For accurate, up-to-date COVID-19 information and best practices related to infection control measures, please refer to guidance from your local Public Health Agency and/or the Centre for Disease Control.*

For more information, please refer to [What Matters to You? Unmasking Communication during a Pandemic pamphlet](#).

# What Matters to You?

## Unmasking Communication During a Pandemic



### What is it all about?

Now more than ever, in these unique, constantly changing times, creating the space for “What Matters to You?” conversations between patients, caregivers, families and their health care providers holds utmost importance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health care providers have looked for ways they can continue to build trusting relationships with their patients despite the communication challenges experienced by wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). This resource has been developed to identify ways in which health care providers can overcome these challenges, build relationships and establish trust with patients. A review of the literature and current practices has identified the following areas for consideration:

### Non-Verbal Communication

- Be mindful: Focus your attention on the encounter and be present <sup>1,2</sup>
- Have a relaxed posture and behave calmly; project a positive attitude <sup>2,3</sup>
- Always look directly at your patient when you are having a conversation and maintain eye contact. If possible, let them see your face from a distance<sup>4-6</sup> or use an innovative solution such as a face mask with a clear front for lip readers <sup>9,12-14</sup>
- Be responsive in the conversation, intentionally use gestures and facial expressions – smile with your eyes. Stay alert for visual clues from the patient and pay attention to their body language <sup>5,6</sup>
- Be aware of power imbalance (those fully covered up vs those with little clothing on) – make it as comfortable as possible <sup>7</sup>
- Use gentle touch when wearing gloves, if appropriate<sup>5</sup>
- Stand with a light or window behind you and stand still in one spot so the patient can focus on you <sup>8</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Groot-Alberts, L. The art of communicating compassion in PPE: Pantomime of Purposeful Expression - Palliative Care Victoria. <https://www.pallcarevic.asn.au/the-art-of-communicating-compassion-in-ppe-pantomime-of-purposeful-expression/>.

<sup>2</sup>British Geriatrics Society (2020). Trying to Make Effective, Mindful Communication Through PPE as Easy as ABC! <https://www.bgs.org.uk/blog/trying-to-make-effective-mindful-communication-through-ppe-as-easy-as-abc>.

<sup>3</sup>Davis, T., and ProCRNA Communicating in PPE . <https://procrna.com/tag/communicating-in-ppe/>.

<sup>4</sup>Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (2020). Tips for Communicating between People Wearing Masks and Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. <https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/SENIORS-DISABILITIES/SPPD/Documents/mask-tips.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>Social Care Institute for Excellence COVID-19, dementia and care homes: Questions and answers for social care. <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/questions-answers/dementia-care-homes>.

<sup>6</sup>University of Iowa Effective Communication through PPE | The Loop. <https://medcom.uiowa.edu/theloop/patient-care/effective-communication-through-ppe>.

<sup>7</sup>Performing Medicine, and NHS London (2020). Coping with Personal Protective Equipment: Top Tips from Actors Used to Working in Restrictive Clothing & Equipment.

<sup>8</sup>National Healthcare Communication Programme (2020). Communication skills for staff wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Making conversations easier.

## Verbal Communication

- Introduce yourself at the start of every encounter with a patient and have a picture of yourself, with name and role on the outside of your PPE for patients to see <sup>5,9,10</sup>
- Acknowledge the PPE and make it a human encounter by acknowledging the situation and restrictions. Seek the patient's perspective <sup>6-8</sup>
- Inform patients about the difference in patient journey upon arrival and that they may receive limited care if they are in isolation <sup>11-13</sup>
- Perform an audio check and ask for feedback, i.e. "Can you hear me/understand me okay?" Avoid assuming everyone speaks and understands English; translation may be required <sup>11,14</sup>
- Ask "What Matters To You?" during the encounter
- Speak slowly, loudly or more deeply. Make sure to articulate your thoughts clearly by enunciating and repeat things to help clarify and allow the patient more time to respond <sup>5,6,10,15</sup>
- Match the patient's tone of voice, energy levels, words they use and gestures <sup>5,6,10,15</sup>
- Validate and legitimize the patient's feelings and explicitly express emotion with empathetic verbal statements (i.e. I sense that you're feeling really anxious right now. Is that right?; I am sad to hear that; or I am smiling with you under this mask) <sup>8,10,14</sup>
- Be patient and use teach back or closed-loop communication (patient or health care provider communications being repeated back and confirmed with one-another) to reduce misunderstandings. When possible, share information in a dialogue versus monologue and involve the patient in the care planning process <sup>3,8,14</sup>
- Show your sense of humour – laugh, smile, and communicate reassurance so people feel at ease <sup>5</sup>

## Written/Digital Solutions

- Provide identification boards with photographs and information about each team member <sup>8,10,11</sup>
- Inquire with patients about sensory needs and arrange for assistive devices, if necessary <sup>10</sup>
- Use visual aids like a whiteboard, smartphone and pen/paper <sup>8,15</sup>
- Use technology like speech-to-text apps (e.g. Google's Live Transcribe, Microsoft Translator and Apple Notes), digital flash cards (e.g. Cardmedic) and captioning (e.g. Communication Access Real Time Translation – CART) <sup>15</sup>
- Use video communication for patients who need to lip read<sup>14</sup>
- Ensure you have high-quality wi-fi in care settings <sup>15</sup>
- Provide tablets with internet connectivity that could be loaned to patients <sup>15</sup>

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PVN is guided by patient and health care partners and administered by the:



<sup>9</sup>Evidently Cochrane (2020). Personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers: new Cochrane evidence . <https://www.evidentlycochrane.net/personal-protective-equipment/>.

<sup>10</sup>Houchens, N., and Tipirneni, R. (2020). Compassionate Communication Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. Journal of hospital medicine 15, 437–439.

<sup>11</sup>Dentistry UK (2020). 10 steps back to practice – communication – Dentistry Online. <https://www.dentistry.co.uk/2020/07/07/10-steps-back-practice-covid-19-communication/>.

<sup>12</sup>National Association of the Deaf (2020). COVID-19: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communication Access Recommendations for the Hospital. <https://www.nad.org/covid19-communication-access-recs-for-hospital/>.

<sup>13</sup>National Association of the Deaf (2020). Communications & Medical Access in the Hospital During Disasters: Temporary Recommendations for Hospitals and Medical Facilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic. University of Iowa Effective Communication through PPE | The Loop. <https://medcom.uiowa.edu/theloop/patient-care/effective-communication-through-ppe>.

<sup>14</sup>Fuller, G., and Howell, M. (2020). Can You Hear Me Now? Communicating Across the COVID-19 PPE Chasm. <https://www.texmed.org/TexasMedicineDetail.aspx?Pageid=46106&id=54301>.

<sup>15</sup>Royal College of Physicians (2020). Read my lips: the downside of PPE (and how you can improve communication) | RCP London. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/news/read-my-lips-downside-ppe-and-how-you-can-improve-communication>.