

# Effective Communication: A Foundation in Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) Care

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Communication is a foundation for good medical practice, particularly when managing chronic conditions. It is not just about transmitting information, but also about raising a mutual understanding between the clinician and the patient. It includes verbal communication- clear exchange of information through spoken or written words - and non-verbal communication- such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and tone of voice. The two kinds play an equally vital role, and by integrating them, we can fill gaps in knowledge, align care with patient values, and strengthen the therapeutic relationship.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a silent condition, with a slow and asymptomatic course. By the time treatment becomes necessary, patients are often surprised by the overwhelming burden of managing treatment options, disease progression, and end-of-life decisions. When dealing with CKD patients, communication plays an essential role in their care, as it has a therapeutic role throughout all stages of the disease influencing treatment adherence, quality of life, and clinical outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

In the early stages of CKD, clear communication regarding lifestyle modifications can help slow down the disease progression. Emphasizing the importance of controlling blood pressure, diabetes and dietary habits can have a massive role in preventing future complications. This is only achievable through a bidirectional relationship, where active listening allows patients to voice questions and place concerns, and a personalized and tailored approach can be made.<sup>2</sup>

As CKD advances, symptoms, complications, and the need for kidney replacement therapies (KRT) make disease management more complex, further highlighting the importance of effective communication. At this stage, patients and their families face emotional and psychological challenges, including fear, anxiety, and uncertainty regarding the future. Clear, effective, and empathetic communication can provide vital information about procedures, as

well as information about benefits and side effects of various treatments. With that, stress related to treatments is reduced, and confidence in the treatment process is granted, which turns into higher adherence to self-care and, subsequently, better health outcomes. Additionally, providing emotional support it is key to the patient overall well-being, reinforcing that communication is a therapeutic foundation in CKD, probably as important as medication or KRT.<sup>1,2</sup>

Despite widespread acknowledgment of communication's importance, studies reveal significant gaps in the provided information in patient-doctor communication. Many patients perceive that their nephrologists avoid and struggle to address critical topics such as diagnosis and prognosis. We make ourselves believe that this is frequently related to time constraints and emotional distancing, as well as limited health literacy. However, a lack of formal training in communication skills also prevails.<sup>3</sup>

Undergraduate medical education frequently overlooks this essential skill, although it is essential for every doctor. This is sustained over time, as nephrology residents report having insufficient training in communication during their residency, despite a desire to improve it. Addressing this gap through courses and curriculum integration would better prepare healthcare professionals, providing them with a stronger ability to incorporate this therapeutic foundation into their practice.<sup>2,3</sup>

Finally, while communication with patients is a fundamental aspect of our clinical practice, it is equally important to promote collaboration within the multidisciplinary team that manages CKD patients, which includes nurses, nutritionists, social workers, and therapists. A sustained exchange of thoughts, ideas and perceptions ensures an adjusted treatment plan, and guarantees a patient-centered practice.

At every single stage of CKD, communication is a therapeutic tool that enhances treatment adherence, improves the quality of life by providing better symptom control and

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increases emotional health, and strengthens the patient-doctor relationship. By investing in effective communication, we contribute directly to the treatment success, symptom relief and the emotional well-being of patients

and their families/caregivers. CKD is a challenging condition where clear and compassionate communication brings the opportunity to provide more humanized care.

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