

SUPPORTING PATIENTS TO MAKE LIFESTYLE CHANGES



Utilising health coaching in lifestyle medicine conversations with patients/clients presenting with chronic health conditions helps consultations to more effective and efficient.

When a patient/client comes to see us with a chronic condition and we know lifestyle behaviours play an important role in management of this condition, we may think this is an opportunity to talk to them about how changing lifestyle factors can help them to feel better, and provide helpful information and advice.

This is not always well received or effective. This can be due to the priorities, past experiences and expectations of the patient/client as well as our approach to offering and providing information.

When it comes to delivering information, we need to first find out how the patient/client feels about their current management, what they already know and if there are any skill and/or knowledge gaps.

People with chronic conditions may have had this condition for a long time and have a lot of knowledge and experience, and when we provide general information without tailoring it to their specific knowledge/skill gaps we can create disengagement instead of building a trusting relationship.

Open questions can provide useful information in a short time and allow you to work out where/if a client/patient needs additional support. You can then tailor your approach to their stage of change.

Adopt a client centred approach

Clients begin to take responsibility for their health when they feel empowered and in control of their own health journey

- Approach each consultation with openness, non judgment and curiosity
- Don't assume you know what is going on, or the best solution.
- Ensure you and the client/patient have the same agenda and expectations of the consultation

We can help communicate autonomy, that our clients are in charge and that we are there to support them.

SUPPORTING PATIENTS TO MAKE LIFESTYLE CHANGES



Consider readiness to change

There are different stages of change & clients may not be ready to change. They're not being difficult or non-compliant, they're in the pre-contemplation stage.

If a client seems stuck or resistant:

- Maybe they don't see change as personally relevant
- Maybe the change feels impossible, too hard
- Maybe they're still weighing up the cost and benefit

Identifying a client's readiness to change helps you choose the right approach - communication, strategy and goals -to move clients closer to change.

Communicate - reflect, summarise, affirm

Communication builds trust, connection, helps a client feel heard and prevents clients from feel interrogated

- Ask open questions
- Use double sided reflections
- Summarise, summarise summarise

Using your communication toolkit helps your client to tell their story, feel heard, supported and gives them space to explore their motivation and ability to change.

Tap into motivation

Often when we are trying to support someone to change their behaviour we focus on what we think are the reasons to change, the benefits that we think should matter. We may try convincing, persuading, and sometimes lecturing about the benefits of change, telling people why change should be important to them. Unfortunately, telling people they should change often results in resistance and makes them less willing to change.

Don't assume what is or should be important to your client

- Ask open questions to find out what is important
- Connect the dots between the behaviour and getting something they value
- Help clients imagine a healthier future

We can help clients strengthen their reasons to change- find benefits that are personally important and relevant.

SUPPORTING PATIENTS TO MAKE LIFESTYLE CHANGES



Find the information gap

Health professionals are experts in their area of health and are often skilled at providing information which they assume will help a client to take action and change their behaviour. Providing standardised or unsolicited information does not respect the client's current knowledge or understanding and can damage the therapeutic relationship. Information is valuable however when the client has identified they have a knowledge gap.

- Ask open questions to find out what the client already knows, and what they want to know
- Find the gap and provide the information they need, when they need it
- Less is best! Information overload leads to overwhelm and discord

Information can be helpful however first understand what information is missing and what would be useful.

The client finds their strategies & solutions

Clients already have a wealth of experience, past attempts and knowledge about their health

- Ask open questions to find out what they've tried before and what they feel ready to try now
- Support them to come up with solutions that feel achievable, and ones they are ready to take
- Resist the temptation to jump in with your own advice and solutions

We can help clients come up with solutions that honour their experience, knowledge preferences and match their stage of change.

Client sets the goals & action plans

Goals need to be client centred - they need to come from the client and match their priorities and stage of change

- Ask open questions to find out what they are ready to work on
- Support them to come up with goals that feel achievable, and ones where they are ready to take action
- Resist the temptation to jump in with goals based on your priorities- their goals may not be the ones you'd choose!

We can help clients come up with small achievable goals that build confidence and slowly but surely lead to sustainable change.

Want to learn more? Use code 100ASLMLW22 to get \$100 discount on 'Creating Change in 15 minute Consults!'

Sharon Curtain and Shivaun Conn
Certified Health Coaches, Trainers & Assessors, & Dietitians
Email us: info@accreditedhealthcoaching.com.au