7 Steps to Help Minds Change: A Comprehensive Guide for Allied Health Clinicians

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Introduction

Allied health clinicians often encounter patients with strong beliefs that may limit their engagement with treatment.

Navigating these beliefs with compassion and skill is essential for effective care and building a strong therapeutic alliance.

This guide integrates key principles from David McRaney's *How Minds Change: The New Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion*, providing practical strategies to build rapport, foster trust, and encourage reflective thinking in patients.

- Encounter patients with strong beliefs limiting treatment engagement
- Navigate beliefs with compassion and skill
- Build strong therapeutic alliance
- Integrate principles from David McRaney's book
- Provide strategies for rapport, trust, and reflective thinking



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Understanding the Science of Belief Change

David McRaney explores how beliefs are formed and changed, highlighting that beliefs are closely tied to identity and social connections.

Changing a belief isn't simply about presenting facts; it's about engaging with the emotional and cognitive processes that support that belief. Understanding this can help clinicians facilitate more meaningful conversations with patients.



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Step 1: Prepare and Build Rapport

1

Self-Awareness and Mindfulness

Before initiating the conversation, reflect on your own biases and assumptions.

The aim is for you to remain present and non-judgemental as you enter the conversation.

2

Clarify Intentions

Be clear about your objectives.

Are you seeking to understand the patient's perspective or just to guide them towards considering your views?

If your intention is to use logic and evidence to convince the other person that your belief is correct you may be heading towards a confrontation rather than a exploratory conversation.

3

Establish Trust

Use genuine curiosity and empathy to create a trusting relationship.

Patients are more likely to open up when they feel respected.

4

Example

"I'm keen to understand your thoughts about this treatment option. Would you be comfortable sharing your views with me?"

Reflection Question for Clinicians: How can I ensure I'm approaching this conversation openly and without prejudice?

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Step 2: Understand and Explore Beliefs

1. ## Invite Open Dialogue

   Encourage the patient to express their beliefs in their own words.

2. ## Reflective Listening

   Summarise their points to confirm understanding. "So, you're feeling uncertain about..."

3. ## Confidence Rating

   Ask them to rate their confidence in their belief from 1 to 100.

4. ## Open-Ended Questions

   Example: "What experiences have shaped your views on this?"

5. ## Motivational Interviewing Techniques

   Explore discrepancies between their beliefs and their health goals.

6. ## Example

   "Tell me more about what leads you to feel this way about the treatment?"

   If the number they choose in point 3 is under 90, ask "Why didn't you pick a lower number?"

   The answer to this question helps to create cognitive dissonance.

Reflection Question for Clinicians: Am I listening to understand, rather than to reply?

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Step 3: Encourage Reflection and Broader Perspectives

1 Gently Challenge Assumptions

2 Create Safe Environment

3 Address Cognitive Dissonance

4 Use Storytelling

Gently Challenge Assumptions: Introduce alternative viewpoints carefully to avoid defensiveness.

Safe Environment for Reflection: Ensure the patient feels secure in considering new ideas.

Address Cognitive Dissonance: Present new information as an opportunity for growth.

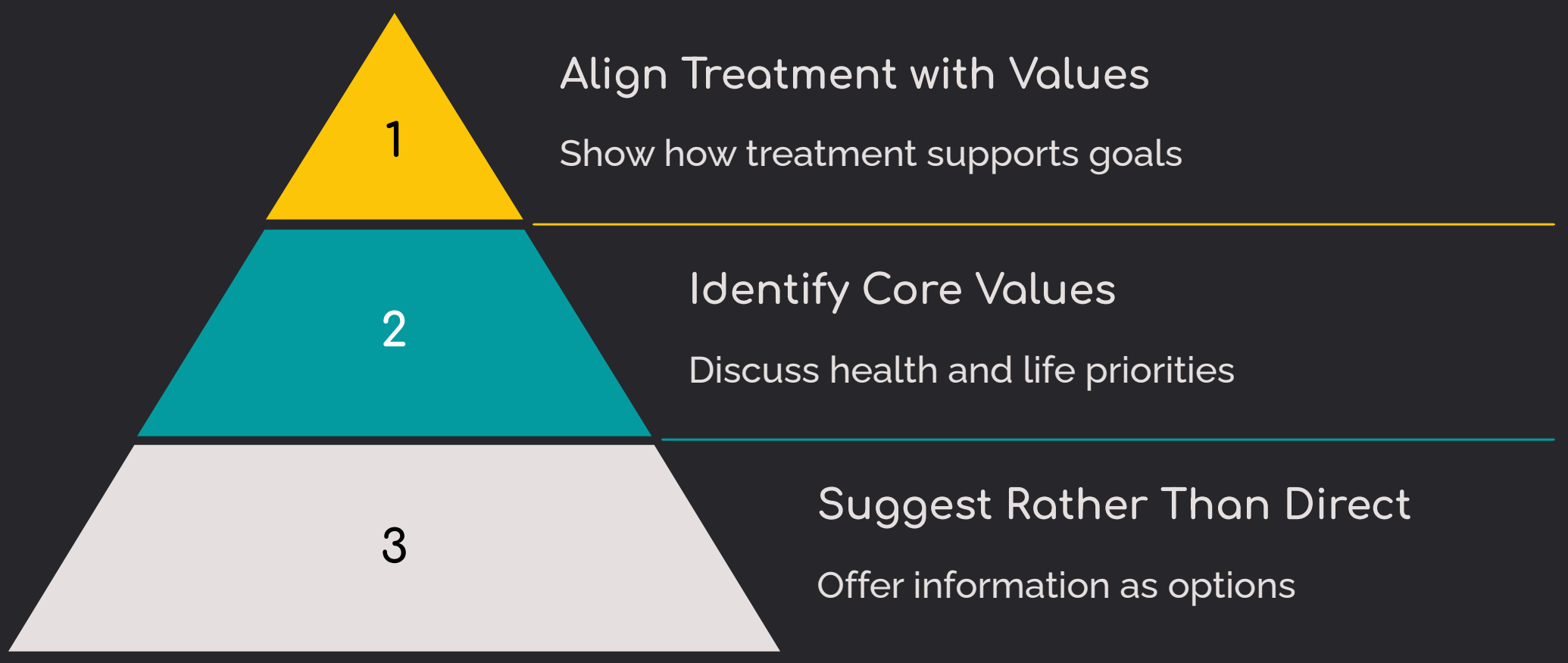
Use Storytelling: Share experiences of other patients who had similar beliefs but benefited from different approaches.

Example: "I worked with someone who had similar concerns. They found that trying this approach made a significant difference. Would it be out of the question to share their experience?"

> *Reflection Question for Clinicians*: How can I present new perspectives in a way that's respectful and non-confrontational?

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Step 4: Connect with Values and Share Perspectives



Identify Core Values: Discuss what's most important to the patient in their health and life.

Align Treatment with Values: Show how the proposed treatment supports their goals.

Suggest Rather Than Direct: Offer information as options to consider.

Example: "You've mentioned that being able to play with your grandchildren is important to you. This treatment could help you achieve that by improving your mobility."

Reflection Question for Clinicians: How can I align my recommendations with the patient's values and priorities?



Step 5: Utilise Visual Aids and Tools

1 Decision Trees

2 Confidence Scales

3 Comparison Tables

4 Templates and Examples

- **Decision Trees**: Help patients visualise the outcomes of different choices.

- **Confidence Scales**: Use visual scales to assess and discuss the strength of their beliefs.

- **Comparison Tables**: Outline concerns alongside potential solutions.

- **Templates and Examples**: Provide clear, easy-to-understand materials.

- **Example**: Presenting a chart that compares the benefits and risks of different treatment options.

Reflection Question for Clinicians: What visual tools could enhance the patient's understanding and engagement?



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Step 6: Follow Up and Appreciate Openness

1. **Express Gratitude**

   Thank the patient for sharing their thoughts.

2. **Demonstrate Ongoing Support**

   Show that you're committed to supporting them.

3. **Example**

   "I appreciate you sharing your perspective. Perhaps we can revisit this discussion next week after you've had some time to reflect?"

> *Reflection Question for Clinicians*: How can I continue to support the patient in their journey towards positive change?

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Step 7: Practise Patience and Continuous Learning

1

Respect Boundaries

Recognise when to give the patient time and space to reflect on their beliefs.

2

Continuous Reflection

Keep a record of your interactions to identify areas for improvement.

3

Peer Discussions

Share experiences with colleagues for mutual learning.

4

Stay Informed

Keep up-to-date with the latest research and techniques.

5

Example

Participating in professional development workshops on patient communication.

> *Reflection Question for Clinicians*: What have I learned from this interaction, and how can I apply it moving forward?

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Integrating Cultural and Ethical Considerations

- **Cultural Sensitivity**: Be aware of cultural influences on beliefs and health behaviours throughout each step.
- **Inclusive Language**: Use language that is respectful and free from jargon.
- **Respect Autonomy**: Honour the patient's right to make their own decisions.
- **Informed Consent**: Ensure the patient understands and agrees to any proposed treatments.

Reflection Question for Clinicians: Am I considering the patient's cultural background and ethical rights in my approach?



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Practical Scenarios

Scenario 1: Resistance to Physical Activity

A patient believes that exercise will exacerbate their chronic pain.

Approach:

1. **Build Rapport**
   Invite them to share their experiences with exercise and pain.
2. **Explore Beliefs**
   Ask if they are open to you sharing stories of patients who improved with gentle activity.
3. **Connect with Values**
   Connect increased mobility with their value of independence.
4. **Use Visual Aids**
   Use a chart to show gradual improvements with controlled exercise.

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Scenario 2: Preference for a Non-Recommended Treatment Method

A patient insists on receiving a specific treatment they've read about online, which is not evidence-based for their condition.

Approach:

Step 1

Ask the patient to explain what they know about the treatment and why they believe it will help.

Step 2

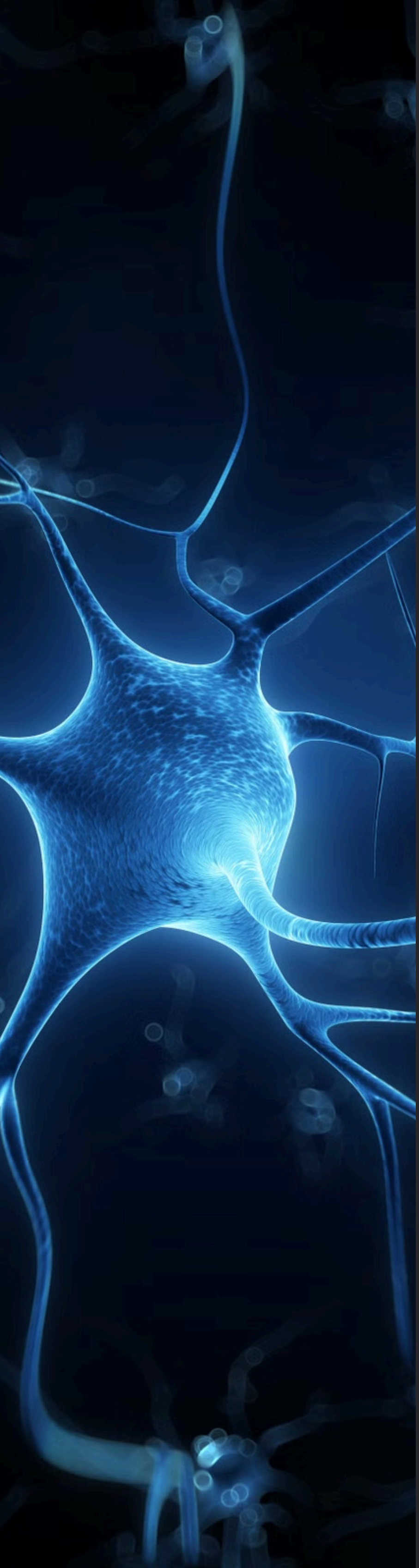
Get permission for you to gently provide information about the effectiveness of various treatments, including the one they prefer.

Step 3

Align recommended treatments with their health goals and values.

Visual Aid: Present a comparison table showing the evidence supporting different treatment options.

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Example Dialogue

Clinician: "I understand you've been researching this treatment. Could you share what appeals to you about it?"

Patient: "I read that it has helped many people and I feel it's the best option for me."

Clinician: "It's great that you're proactive about your health. Your goal is to (insert goal), correct?"

Patient: "Yes, exactly."

Clinician: "While the treatment you're suggesting has some benefits in certain cases, would you be against looking at all the options together to find what's most effective for your specific situation?"

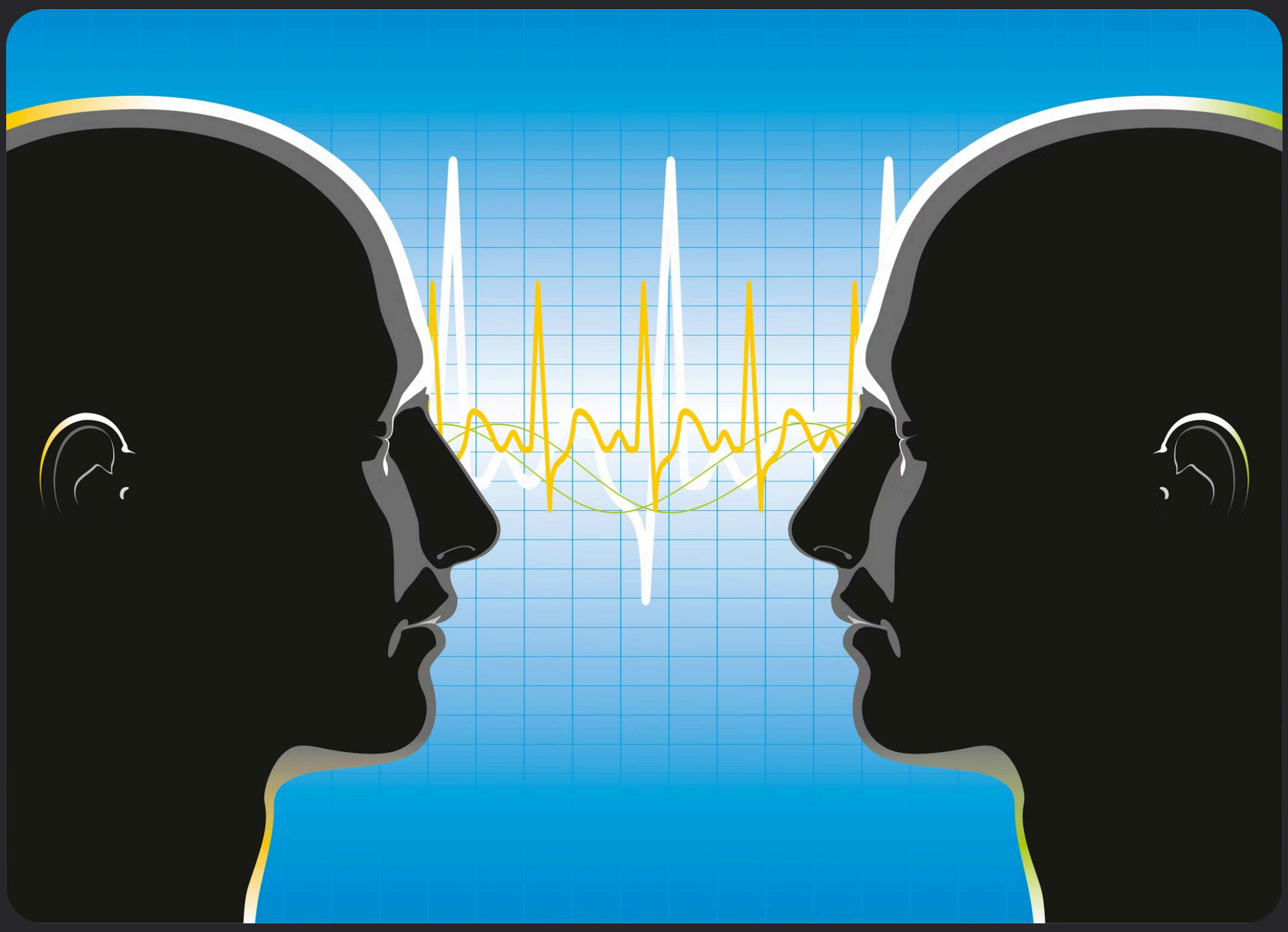
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Conclusion

By incorporating these strategies with empathy and respect, clinicians can create a therapeutic environment where patients feel understood and supported. This approach not only fosters openness and trust but also contributes to patient-centred care and more effective treatment outcomes.

Remember: Changing minds is a journey, not a destination. Patience, persistence, and compassion are your allies in supporting patients through this process.

- Create a therapeutic environment where patients feel understood and supported
- Foster openness and trust
- Contribute to patient-centred care and more effective treatment outcomes
- Changing minds is a journey, not a destination
- Use patience, persistence, and compassion as allies in supporting patients



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Additional Resources

Books

- McRaney, D. How Minds Change: The New Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion.
- Miller, W.R., & Rollnick, S. Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change.

Workshops and Resources

Contact me for live or online workshop opportunities.

Handling Patients with Preconceived Ideas: A Guide to for Allied Health Providers

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Feel free to share this resource to help more clinicians master the delicate art of changing minds.

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