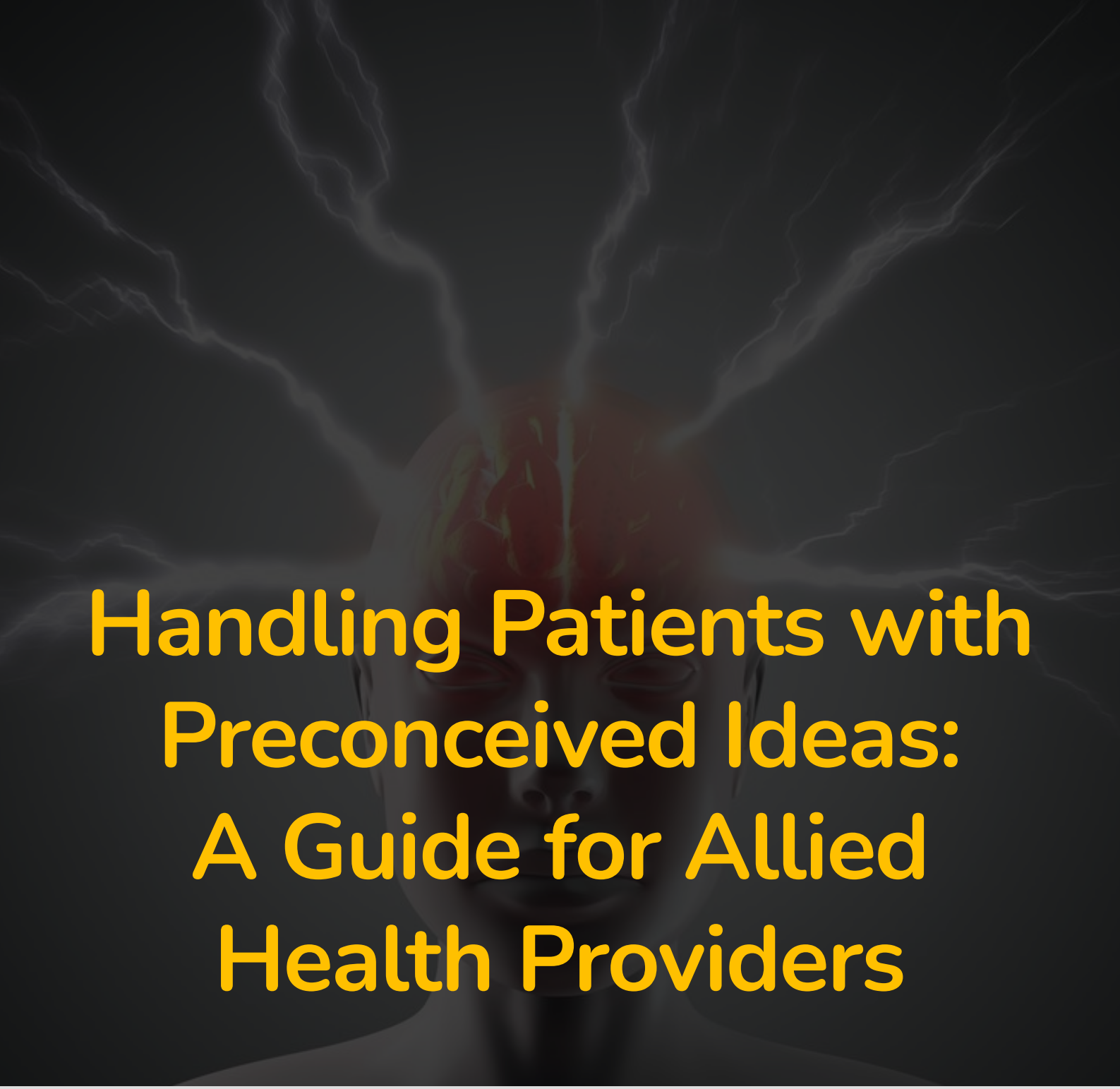


Handling Patients with Preconceived Ideas: A Guide for Allied Health Providers

Annette Tonkin

thinking physio

Understanding the Patient Perspective

Patients often come into consultations with preconceived ideas from internet searches or advice from other healthcare professionals. While this can be frustrating, it's important to recognise that these patients are trying to be proactive and involved in their health. Their behaviour may stem from:

- Anxiety about their condition
- Previous negative healthcare experiences
- Desire to be involved in their care
- Need for validation and understanding



Strategies for Building Trust and Maintaining Rapport

1. Practise Active Listening

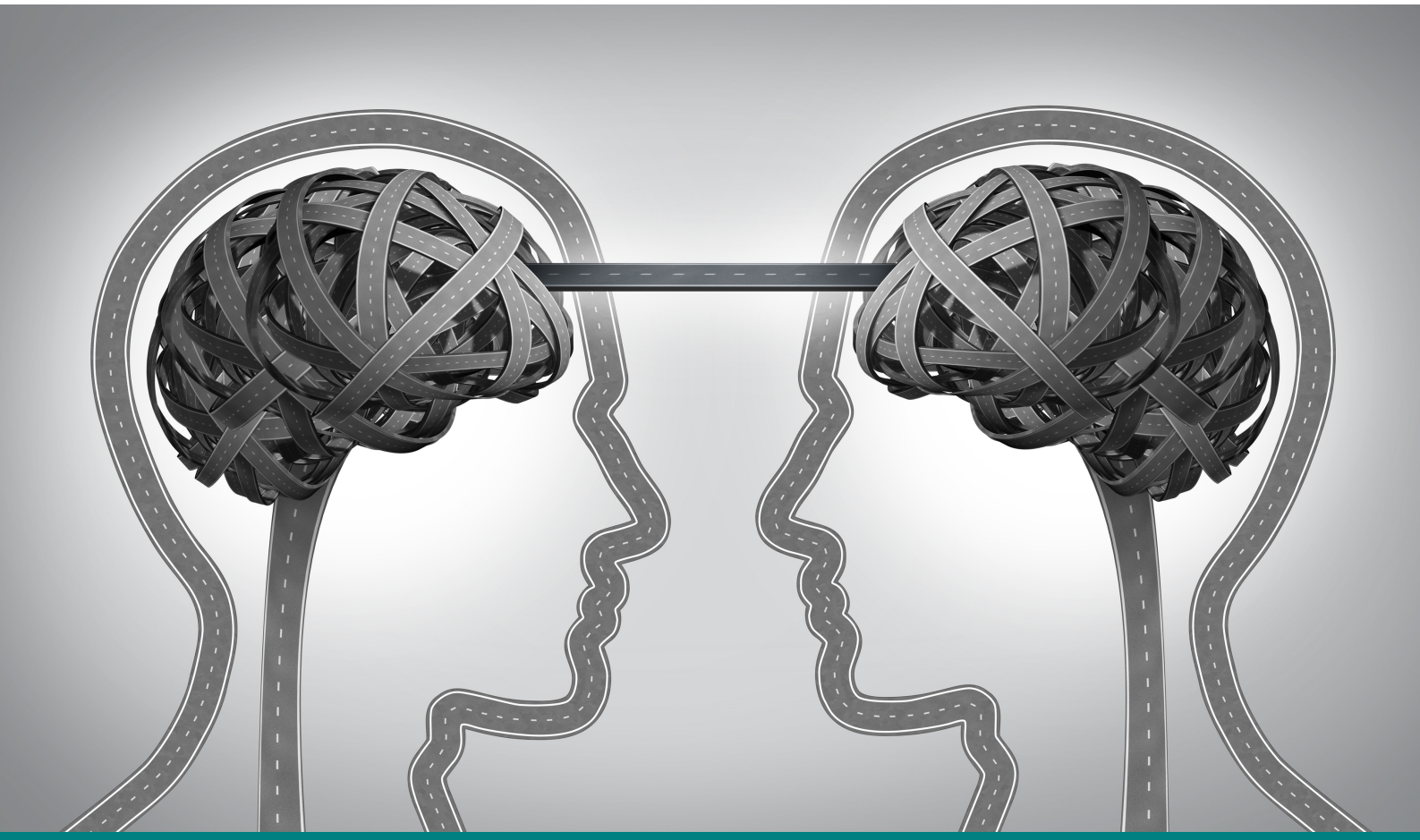
- **Give undivided attention** and maintain appropriate eye contact.
- **Allow patients to express concerns** without interruption.
- **Use reflective listening** to show understanding, e.g. *"It sounds like you're worried about……"*
- **Paraphrase key points** to ensure understanding, e.g. *"Correct me if I'm wrong but , it sounds like you're concerned about…."*

2. Acknowledge and Validate

- **Recognise the patient's effort** in researching their condition.
- Use phrases like, *"I see you've done some research—let's go through it together."*
- **Show empathy** for their frustrations and concerns.
- **Bridge differences** by validating their perspective, e.g. *"I understand why you may be leaning towards that treatment based on what you've read. Let's explore it further together."*

3. Establish Common Ground

- **Find shared goals** for treatment outcomes.
- **Create a collaborative approach** to care.
- **Focus on what matters most** to the patient.
- **Utilise motivational interviewing techniques** to encourage patients to articulate their own goals, e.g. *"What would an ideal outcome look like for you?"*



Maintaining Emotional Balance as a Clinician

1. Internal Awareness

- **Take a moment to centre yourself** before patient interactions.
- **Recognise your emotional triggers** and be mindful of your reactions.
- **Remember**, patient behaviour isn't personal—it often reflects their own fears and experiences.
- **Practise self-compassion** to reduce frustration, e.g. remind yourself, *"I'm doing my best to help this patient with the knowledge they have."*

2. Professional Development

- **Set clear boundaries** while maintaining compassion.
- **Practise mindfulness** before consultations, e.g. *"Take three deep breaths to centre yourself."*
- **Engage in peer discussions** or supervision to share challenges and gain support from other allied health professionals.



How to Apply These Strategies in Practice

During Consultations: A Collaborative Approach

1. **Acknowledge and Explore** the patient's efforts:

   "I see you've done some research—what have you found that stands out to you?"

   Invite them to share their perspective so that you can better understand their thinking.

2. **Validate and Align** with their understanding:

   "It's great that you're looking into this—there's a lot of information out there. Would you be open to discussing how this fits into your particular situation?"

   Find points of agreement to build trust before offering new information. For example, *"I agree that staying active is important. What about talking about how you can do that safely given your current condition."*



3. **Share Expertise and Facilitate Choice**:

   "From my experience and what we know from the latest research, this approach might work well for your condition. What are your thoughts on this?"

   Provide multiple options where possible, and involve the patient in decision-making: *"We could try this approach or explore another option. Which one feels right for you at this stage?"*

4. **Collaborative Problem-Solving**:

   - *"What challenges do you foresee with this plan?"*
   - **Work together** to address barriers: *"How can we adapt this so that it fits better with your lifestyle?"*



Quick Reference Summary

- **Key Phrases to Acknowledge Research**:
  - "I see you've done some research—let's go through it together."
  - "I appreciate that you're proactive about your health."
  - "It makes sense why you'd be curious about that, given what you've read."
- **Actions to Maintain Rapport**:
  - **Listen without interruption**.
  - **Reflect back** what the patient has said to confirm understanding.
  - **Bridge differing opinions** with empathy.



Adapting Strategies to Different Patient Personalities

- **Anxious Patients**: Use gentle, open-ended questions like, *"How can I make this process more comfortable for you?"* to reduce anxiety and foster trust. **Consider offering reassurance** with phrases like, *"It's completely normal to feel this way, and we'll work through it together."*
- **Sceptical Patients**: Use phrases like, *"How open-minded are you about..."* to reduce defensiveness and invite exploration without direct confrontation. **Provide transparent information** and discuss the pros and cons of each option to build credibility.
- **Highly Informed Patients**: Start with, *"What do you know about..."* to validate their knowledge and ensure they feel respected before adding further details. **Encourage them to share their perspective** by asking, *"What are your thoughts on how this might work for you?"*



Addressing Google and "Expert" Opinions

- **Acknowledge Sources**: When patients reference information they found online or from another provider, **acknowledge** that it's good they are seeking information. *"It's great that you're looking into this—would you be open to discussing how it fits your unique case."*
- **Redirect Productively**: If the information they have is misleading or incorrect, **redirect without dismissing**. *"That's a common suggestion online, along with many others. Would you be against me explaining why it might not apply in your particular situation?"*
- **Provide Authoritative Resources**: Suggest reliable sources for further reading to guide their research, e.g. *"If you're interested in reading more, this site provides trustworthy information that's easy to understand."*



Closing Note

By implementing these strategies, you can turn potentially challenging situations into opportunities for connection and empowerment. Patients who are informed—whether correctly or not—are showing a willingness to engage in their health journey. Your role is to guide that energy into a productive partnership for better outcomes.

Allied health providers are uniquely positioned to influence patient outcomes through strong communication and collaborative care. These techniques are designed to help you foster trust, maintain professional boundaries and support your patients effectively on their path to better health.



Feel free to share this resource to help more clinicians master the delicate art of managing preconceived ideas

Transform patient care with bespoke coaching and workshops—contact me to book a call!

Website: thinking.physio

Email: annette@thinking.physio

Socials: Facebook & Instagram: Thinking.physio | **LinkedIn**: Annette Tonkin