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Understanding the Root Cause: How to Uncover What's Behind Patient Objections



Annette Tonkin annette@thinking.physio www.thinking.physio



Introduction

As a healthcare clinician, patient objections are a natural part of the treatment process.

Whether it's about time, cost, or uncertainty about the treatment plan, addressing objections effectively requires understanding the true root cause.

This guide will help you go beyond surface-level concerns to uncover what may be really driving patient resistance.

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The 9 Key Reasons Patients Raise Objections

1. Lack of Connection to Purpose

Surface Concern:
"I'm not sure how this will help me in the long run."

Deeper Concern:
"I'm afraid this treatment will be a waste of time or won't improve my life in a meaningful way."

2. Fear of Losing Control

Surface Concern:
"I'm not sure about this."

Deeper Concern:
"I don't trust that you understand what's best for me, and I'm worried about giving up control."

3. Uncertainty About Outcomes

Surface Concern:
"What if it doesn't work?"

Deeper Concern:
"I'm scared of investing time, money, and effort into something that might not work, leaving me worse off."

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4. Previous Negative Experiences

Surface Concern:
"I've tried this before, and it didn't work."

Deeper Concern:
"I'm still hurt from past failures, and I don't want to experience that disappointment again."

5. Overwhelm from Complexity

Surface Concern:
"This sounds like too much to manage right now."

Deeper Concern:
"I'm already struggling to manage my life, and this feels like one more thing I might fail at."

6. Fear of Failure

Surface Concern:
"What if I start and can't follow through?"

Deeper Concern:
"I'm afraid I'll let myself or others down by not following through, and I don't want to face that shame."

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7. Avoidance of Short-Term Discomfort

Surface Concern:
“This looks like it is going to hurt and I don’t think I can handle the pain right now.”

Deeper Concern:
"I’m not sure I’m strong enough to handle the discomfort, and I’m afraid of failure."

8. Lack of Trust in the Relationship

Surface Concern:
"I’m not sure you really understand what I’m going through.”

Deeper Concern:
"I don’t feel safe enough with you yet, and I’m not sure you’ll really advocate for my best interests."

9. Desire for Validation

Surface Concern:
"I don’t think you understand how hard this will be for me.”

Deeper Concern:
"I feel invisible and dismissed, and I’m unsure if you’re taking me seriously."

3 Key Strategies to Uncover the Root Cause

1. **Use Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions encourage patients to expand on their concerns, giving you insight into their true hesitation.

Examples of effective open-ended questions:

- "Tell me more about what's making you unsure?"
- "What's your biggest concern with the treatment plan?"
- "What do you feel would make this plan work better for you?"
- "Apart from (insert concern), what other concerns do you have else?"

2. **Attentive Listening and Clarification**

Listen attentively, both to the words and the emotions behind them. When in doubt, ask for clarification.

Techniques for effective listening:

- Paraphrasing: "It sounds like you're worried about the time commitment."
- Clarifying: "Just to make sure I understand, cost is concern for you, and what else?"

3. **Empathy and Validation**

Patients are more likely to open up when they feel their concerns are being taken seriously. Empathise with their situation and validate their feelings.

How to express empathy:

- "I can see why you might feel that way."
- "It's completely normal to be concerned about starting something new."

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In Summary

The Key message is:

1. The presenting problem is rarely the only problem.
2. The objection is not aimed at you personally.
3. Replace negative emotions with curiosity. It is the backbone of productive outcomes for both of you.

To effectively address patient objections, remember:

1. Ask open-ended questions to get them talking.
2. Listen attentively and clarify any points that seem unclear.
3. Show empathy and validate their concerns, helping them feel understood.
4. Ask the question “and what else is concerning you?” to get a deeper understanding of the resistance.

With these strategies, you’ll uncover the real reasons behind objections and work together with your patients for better outcomes.

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For More Information:

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Annette Tonkin annette@thinking.physio www.thinking.physio