

# Response of Medical Professional Towards Subsequent Communication, Patient Emotion and Visit Length

SABAHAT ALI ZAIDI<sup>1</sup>, SHAMAILA ZAMIR<sup>2</sup>, MUHAMMAD FAISAL JAVAID<sup>3</sup>, SUNDAS ALI<sup>4</sup>, MAHEEN ZEHRRA<sup>5</sup>, GUL MUHAMMAD SHAIKH<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Medical officer, Department of Family Medicine, University College of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Lahore

<sup>2</sup>Senior Demonstrator, Department of Community Medicine, University College of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Lahore

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Niazi Medical and Dental College Sargodha

<sup>4</sup>Senior Demonstrator, Department of Community Medicine, University College of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Lahore

<sup>5</sup>Student, Rashid Latif Dental College, Lahore

<sup>6</sup>Assistant professor, CMH LMC and IOD, Lahore

Corresponding author: Sabahat Ali Zaidi, Email: [sabahat.zaidi8@gmail.com](mailto:sabahat.zaidi8@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study was designed to explore the association between the responses of clinician towards the emotional expression of patients which effect the length of patient's visit in public hospital as the flow of patients is more in public hospitals and clinicians have to manage according to the time as well.

**Method:** This exploratory research was conducted in a public sector tertiary care hospital in Lahore. Data was collected in the form of audio recordings which are transcribed and coded in terms of emotional expression of patients and empathetic response of clinicians. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics was used to report gender and age of patients as well as clinicians. Pearson correlation was used to explore the association between emotional expression of patients and empathetic response of clinician. Association of subsequent emotional expression of patients was also explored in terms of length of visit and clinicians' response.

**Results:** The results revealed that the timing of emotional expression of patients (single time) has a positive relationship with the empathetic response of clinicians ( $r= 0.67$ ,  $P=.001$ ) and the timing of subsequent emotional expression of patients has a negative relationship with the empathetic response of clinicians ( $r= -0.93$ ,  $P=.000$ ).

**Conclusion:** The clinician respond empathetically on emotional expression of patient can help in reducing the subsequent expression of emotions among patients, ultimately visit length will be reduced.

**Keywords:** Visit length, Emotional expression, Empathy, Clinical setup

## INTRODUCTION

The way of communicating with the patients in a health care setting in which the clear depiction of true understanding of patient's view point should be seen while accepting the concerns of patient by a clinician is known as clinical empathy.<sup>1</sup> Adoption of clinical empathy is responsible for the outcomes of applied therapy as responding to the emotions of patient can help him/her to come out of that emotional state and seek the remedy.<sup>2,3</sup> There are many coding systems for communication which are helpful in coding emotional communication in such studies as these are involved in categorizing emotional expressions and code them.<sup>4-6</sup> It is evident from the outcome of such studies that most of the time, clinicians fails to respond to the emotional expressions of patients which later on affect the therapeutic outcomes.<sup>7,8</sup> The argument for such behavior could be that clinicians do not have much time to express empathy while taking care of other important complications. But the concept of empathetic response from the clinicians towards their patients is that they can save time while being empathetic to their patients as rapport building is the basic level to achieve overall success in medical sciences.<sup>8</sup>

It is very important to understand the importance of being empathetic to the patients. Time management is quite relevant for the clinicians while being empathetic towards their patients as they have to conclude all other important concerns related to diagnosis as well as treatment plan to give benefit to their patients at their best. So, this study was designed to explore the association between the responses of clinician towards the emotional expression of patients which effect the length of patient's visit in public hospital as the flow of patients is more in public hospitals and clinicians have to manage according to the time as well.

## METHOD

This exploratory research was conducted in a public sector tertiary care hospital in Lahore. After the ERB approval from the institutional ethical review committee, permission was taken from the medical superintendent of the hospital for data collection. Data was collected in the form of audio recordings which are transcribed and coded in terms of emotional expression of patients and

empathetic response of clinicians. Accuracy of transcription was also checked by listening to the audio recordings while reading the transcribed form. Verona Coding

Definitions of Emotional Sequences (VR-CoDES) was used for coding and its reliability and validity is quite high.<sup>5,6,9,10</sup>

According to VR-CoDES, emotional expression of patients are of two types. One is concern and the other is cue. Concern is a "clear and unambiguous expression of an unpleasant current or recent emotion where the emotion is explicitly verbalized," whereas cue is "a hint which suggests an underlying unpleasant emotion".<sup>5</sup> Expression of emotions was also categorized in two sub-categories. One was emotional expression for the first time and the other was repeated emotional expression.

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics was used to report gender and age of patients as well as clinicians. Pearson correlation was used to explore the association between emotional expression of patients and empathetic response of clinician. Association of subsequent emotional expression of patients was also explored in terms of length of visit and clinicians' response.

## RESULTS

Clinicians taken as participants of interest were 63% females and 37% males. Among patients, 57% were males and 43% were females. The mean length of a visit was 15.5 minutes. Majority of patients had single emotional expression (76%). The number of emotional expression in 120 visits was 678. Single time emotional expression was recorded as 43% whereas 57% responses were subsequent expression of emotions among patients.

It was found that 76% clinicians responded with empathy while maintaining the space for the patients to explain whereas 60% clinicians used non-explicit behaviors towards their patients.

Table 1: Responses of clinicians towards emotional expressions of patients

Reponses	Percentage
Neutral/ Passive expression	57%
Probing about emotional expression	18%
Conceding emotions	16%
Advising	9%

The results revealed that the timing of emotional expression of patients (single time) has a positive relationship with the empathetic response of clinicians ( $r= 0.67, P=.001$ ).

Table 2: Relationship between emotional expression time and response of clinician

	Empathetic response	Emotional expression timing
Empathetic response	-	.67**
Emotional expression timing		-

The results revealed that the timing of subsequent emotional expression of patients has a negative relationship with the empathetic response of clinicians ( $r= -0.93, P=.000$ ).

Table 3: Relationship between subsequent emotional expression time and response of clinician

	Empathetic response	Subsequent Emotional expression timing
Empathetic response	-	-.93***
Subsequent Emotional expression timing		-

### DISCUSSION

The length of clinical visit is complicatedly associated with the emotional communication between patients and clinicians. The findings of the study revealed that how clinicians responds to the emotional expression of patients while managing time during clinical visits. The results of the study supported the findings of a similar study reported similar results based on the study reported relationship of emotional expression and empathetic response while managing time.<sup>8,11</sup> Length of the visit increases with the provision of room to the patients to express their emotions but in case of first time expression of emotions, it improves the quality of session in shorter duration but if the expression of emotion is subsequent, the negative impact on the duration of visit and empathetic response of clinician has been observed.

Comparing the findings of current study with the existing literature, 65 expression of emotions were catered using different techniques during surgical as well as primary care visits. These responses were taken in present of emotional response or missed the opportunity by the clinicians in terms of empathetic response.<sup>8</sup> One similar study used same coding system<sup>11</sup> as used in the current study which is descriptive. The study conducted by Levinson et al., focused on the importance and significance of empathy but definition of empathy is quite different from the inadequate description delivered by VR-CoDES. The level of empathy reported in current study was low among clinicians which was also explored in a similar study.<sup>11</sup> But the concept of less time

consumption associated with empathetic behavior is based on the findings of Levinson et al.<sup>8</sup> It was found that if the clinician respond empathetically on emotional expression of patient can help in reducing the subsequent expression of emotions among patients, ultimately visit length will be reduced.

Active listening from the side of clinician has an important role in developing the level of satisfaction among patients having the feeling of being heard. Clinicians should deal the patients while minimizing the space along with showing the patients about the understanding of his/her emotional expression is important. Evaluating this phenomenon will help in reducing the length of visit as well as with the increased satisfaction of patients.

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