

What's Your Perspective?

Q&A responses by Alexandra Webster, Head of ABDO CPD

Do you think there's a fine line between open questions and being too noseey? As I know some patients don't approve! Not many, but some

I agree, there is a fine line and with some patients it can be more difficult to judge how they may react to what we may perceive as questions that will help us help them. I think, where patients do pull back from the conversation or react negatively you do need to tread carefully. Ideally, if you are able, try to explain why the information may be important to assist you finding the right solution for them. However, where they clearly do not wish to be open, I think all you can do is politely record that the information you have based your advice on was limited.

Is it worth considering that real empathy must come from a similar experience to the PX

I think that where we have experienced a similar situation then we can potentially be more empathetic. However, it does also mean we could be more bias towards how that situation made us feel in our own individual circumstance – which could be slightly different from that of the patient. Ultimately, I think it is possible to have empathy without having the same experience, but it maybe that you are able to connect more easily to the patient if you have. One example would be experiencing presbyopia. A younger person should be able to empathise with the presbyope on how frustrating it is not to be able to do their job like they did previously owing to inconveniences like putting spectacles on or off – this shouldn't take too much imagination. However, to be actually able to share stories of how you were personally affected by presbyopia may help to bond more with the patient and open up a trusting relationship a little more.

Do we not need also to question their expectations?

Yes, uncovering expectations is an important aspect. If we can uncover their needs fully, then we can provide them with informed choice on how the different solutions available may help them – this has to include managing expectations. Back to the presbyopia issue – we don't have a magic wand to cure presbyopia (yet) and so all the solutions available in some way are a compromise, so expectations need to be uncovered and managed – and recorded.