BATHE for Clinical Skills Night

**5 mins: Didactic: What is BATHE and why BATHE?**

Bathe is a simple procedure devised by a physician.

It takes anywhere from 1 to 5 minutes, and you use it with patients or friends or family members who appear to be in psychological distress or if you just want to know what’s on their mind. The purpose is to create a structure for you to develop an **understanding of** what is causing the person to be distressed and then to ***communicate* your understanding** and empathy to the person.

Physicians tend to be pressed for time and often therefore to want to avoid delving into a patient’s psychological state for fear that it would take them too much time to get back out, and/or that they wouldn’t know what to do once the patient told them what was on their mind. So this physician created the simple structure of BATHE to give physicians a **road map** to taking just a few minutes to connect to where a patient is psychologically or emotionally.

OK, but why do it? Aren’t we supposed to be diagnosing and treating medical disease, which is, after all, why the patient came in? Of course, but what increasing evidence tells us is that patients are **more adherent** to your medical advice if you’ve taken the time to understand their emotional state. And, that they are significantly **more satisfied** with their interactions with you as their doctor. That they are **less likely to sue you for malpractice**, which may mean that they feel better about you as a person but which I suspect also indicates that you developed a more effective working relationship, which is less likely to lead to errors or dissatisfaction to begin with.

Ok, you might say, I get it, I should be empathic, but I know how to be nice. Why BATHE? Well, it turns out that **patients don’t just volunteer** what’s on their minds emotionally. And then they leave feeling unheard, and maybe not telling you something important. Unless you specifically ask AND then follow up on the clues they give you with a **technique** like BATHE.

One thing that’s important for you to know, because it’s not intuitive, is that the research says that **using** **BATHE does not add time to your visit**. That’s partly because it’s very quick, and may take the place of small talk that doesn’t have as much added value but takes the same time. AND it may keep the patient from slowing the visit down by bringing up emotional issues toward the end or in an indirect way.

So, before I review the steps, I want to emphasize that BATHE is not only great for you as a doctor, but it’s also **a great technique to have in your back pocket just as a social being**. When your significant other or friend or co-worker is upset, BATHE builds connection between you and that person, because it helps you cut right to what is most on their mind and express your interest or concern. And we all crave that from one another. So don’t hesitate to pull out BATHE and use it wherever you are.

Ok, so the steps:

B: for Background. *What’s been going on in your life*? Or, if someone is visibly upset, just, *what’s going on?*

A: for affect. *How have you been feeling about that?* Or, *how has that made you feel?*

T: This is where you cut to the chase. *What Troubles you the most about this situation?*

H: for Handling. *How have you been Handling that so far?* Support anything positive.

E: for empathy. *That sounds really stressful*. *I hope that you can find a way to* ….. *Please let me know how it goes.*

**5 min. Demo**

My student and I are going to demonstrate a BATHE Interaction for you, so you can see what we’re talking about. And then we’re going to have you practice on each other. You’re each going to have the chance to BATHE and be BATHEd, so be thinking about what issue or concern you want to bring up when you’re being bathed. I’d encourage you to be yourself and use something real that’s on your mind; obviously only use something you’re comfortable talking with a peer about, but it works better if it’s real. It doesn’t have to be something super big or deep. If you just don’t want to do that, think of a patient or friend who you’ve recently interacted with who was upset about something, and play that person. But first, my student and I will do one.

**10 mins Practice in Pairs**

Choose one person to do the BATHING and one person to be BATHED. Again, I’d urge you to talk about something real, because it gives you much more of feel for what this is about. But if not you can act the part of someone you know. I’m going to give you five minutes each, about 3-4 of which you’ll probably spend acting it out, and one minute talking over with each other how it went. And then you’ll switch. Keep in mind that while you should follow the five steps pretty exactly, you can make encouraging comments or ask your partner to tell you a bit more in between steps. It’s a guide more than a script.

**5 mins. Discussion and Questions**

How did that feel to everyone?

What surprised you?

When could you imagine using it?