

Presentation skills for healthcare professionals

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Presentation in medical meetings and conferences is an important element of medical professionalism. It requires special skills and effort, and needs a competent speaker, and good preparation. However, it may reflect negatively on the speaker if he has not prepared very well, because he will not attract the audience and impress them. Quite often in medical meetings, we find ourselves losing interest and attention not because of the topic of the lecture but because of the poor quality of the presentation, and the inappropriate way that the speaker delivers his speech and presents his data. You may be an excellent clinician or researcher, but this is not enough if you do not know how to deliver your idea to others, and convince them with an attractive and focused approach. The objectives of this editorial are to address the skills of medical presentations, for healthcare professionals, and to guide them for the steps of successful presentations with clear message to the appropriate audiences with particular emphasis on the body language. This also focused on how to prepare your slides and organize the contents of the presentation.

A good presentation requires that you know your audience and understand their needs.¹ Tailoring for the audience entails learning on the audience and matching the presentation to their knowledge, educational level, and interests.² Presenting a lecture to undergraduate students is different from presenting the same lecture to postgraduate students, or to sub-specialists in the same field. The purpose of your presentation is to deliver a single, simple, visually accessible, and clearly explained message in reasonable time, which the audience can understand, remember, and use in their daily practice.³

However, to achieve this purpose, the audience must understand the message before they can agree with you. You have to decide on your message at the outset and prepare your message in advance. Do not try to cover all aspects of a complex problem, because you lose the focus on the main message of your presentation. Your

aim is not to copy a textbook and read it in front of the audience. The first 2 minutes is the most important part of your presentation as it is the time for audience to make positive or negative impression on you and on your presentation. The audience will make decisions on you from your first appearance. You cannot make a first impression twice. Even if the audience is very interested in your presentation, their maximum attention span is 30 minutes. Audiences love presentations that do not go on too long.

To deliver a simple and clear message, you need good preparation and early planning. With the era of technology and internet, it is not difficult to find enough materials; however, the art here is in how to put them together. This will distinguish between speakers, and will reflect your special touch and experience in your field. Preparation is not limited to preparing the materials but includes preparing yourself as well. You need to practice and rehearse on your own, or in front of friends or family to make you word-perfect, self-confident, and well-prepared.

Body language is an essential component of the success of your presentation. It will reflect on your control of your presentation and on your attitude. Walk confidently but slowly, do not talk before the first slide is projected, look self-assured and smile, and keep eye contact with your audience throughout your presentation. If you are nervous before you start or during your talk, try to use pause and breathe deeply, but evenly. Speak slowly but loudly and clearly, maintain your volume throughout your presentation at the same tone.⁴ Check the microphone, and ask the audience at the back if they can hear you clearly before you start. Do not stay in one place; try to move around to make sure that you are talking to the whole audience in the front, back, and both sides of the room. Smiling helps to relieve your anxiety, and gives your audience confidence in you but you have to choose the right time

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to smile as unnecessary smiling may reflect negatively on you. If your native language is not English, do not mix words from more than one language as this makes you appear unprofessional, and will irritate the audience and reduce their understanding. Make sure that medical terms are pronounced correctly according to the Standard English language. Keep your pager and cell phone on silence or hand them to a colleague as they are distracting and irritating for your audience. Remember that your external appearance reflects your personality, dress well, do not wear casual clothes, and take care of your head and facial hair. The successful execution of the clinical problem solving, engages both the audience and the discussant in real-time problem solving and relies upon the tenants of experiential learning and clinical reasoning.⁵ Audience participation is very important, and you need to encourage and motivate them by questioning, brainstorming, small group activities, role-playing, case based examples, and directed listening accomplished with use of humor, anecdotes, and quotations.⁶

Your slides. Your slides are just a tool to help you illustrate your data and reinforce your message.⁷ They are part of your presentation, but not the presentation itself. You should be the leader of the presentation, not the slides. Nowadays, a computer is an essential part of any presentation as most speakers are using PowerPoint presentation. You have to be computer oriented and make sure you are familiar with both the hardware and software you are using. Always be ready for any system crash, or technology meltdowns. Bring copies of your presentation as a back-up, or bring your own computer if you are not sure on audiovisual materials in the lecture room.

The appearance of your slides should be consistent and uniform. A simple theme is the best. Use a maximum of 3 colors, which should be consistent throughout your

presentation. The background of your slides should be dark color with lighter letters, or darker letters on a light background. Headings and legends should be consistently labeled. Use a font for body text, which easy to see and read on screen. Slide headers should be a bigger size and of different color from body text and should be consistent through all slides.

The content of your slides should be informative and to the point. Each slide should contain no more than one or 2 points with a maximum of 6 words per line. Specific points can be highlighted within the slide rather than using a laser pointer, which can be distracting and irritating for the audience. Avoid busy and complicated slide, as the audience will not be able to pick it up the main points quickly.

Always start your presentation with the objectives of your talk and conclude your presentation with a wake up summary slide, and allow time for questions and discussion.

References

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