

## Non-verbal Communication – What Message Are You Projecting? #3235



The phlebotomist to the left is saying a lot without uttering a word. With a sweatshirt over her scrubs, her appearance is unprofessional. Her disposable lab coat, haphazardly hung over a nearby shelf, gives the impression she is not ready for work. Seated in the phlebotomy chair, she is hardly ready to greet an incoming patient. Reading a magazine makes her appear uninterested in her job. Consuming a beverage in her draw station represents a lax attitude toward infection control and OSHA regulations. The clutter of tape, gauze and tubes give the appearance of sloppiness and disorganization, and leaves the patient wondering if these items have already been used on a prior patient.



What is wrong with these pants? Scrubs that drag across the ground with every step project an image of someone who is not only unprofessional, but also is careless about infection control. Unfortunately this is not an uncommon sight. You see it in medical facilities. You see it in grocery stores as healthcare workers go shopping after their shift. The look is, without question, unprofessional. The bad impression doesn't stop there. The facility as a whole also suffers from an image problem when they allow their employees to dress in such a reckless manner. But the problem is bigger than the image it projects. In this era of antibiotic resistant pathogens, showing up for work with one's pants dragging across the ground is inexcusable. As the healthcare worker goes about their daily rounds with his/her pants dragging on the floor, a plethora of pathogens pass from patient to patient.



Hands on the hips can portray anger, irritation and impatience. Most of the time healthcare workers do not intend to leave patients with that impression. Working in healthcare, we all get tired, harried, and stressed. We usually don't even know when we are conveying those emotions through our body language. But knowing how we convey those negative feelings can help us develop more positive ones. Ask a trusted co-worker to give you constructive feedback when they observe you unintentionally projecting a negative emotion. Try to stay in touch with your own feelings, and when you catch yourself projecting a negative message correct it. Other ways of creating a bad impression are rolling the eyes, sighing, lack of eye contact with the patient, foot or finger tapping, looking out the window, and looking at your watch repeatedly. When you feel your stress level rising, step out of patient view, take a long deep breath, stretch your muscles, think of something pleasant, and put a smile on your face. Smiling is a habit too, and a great one at that.



Want to make a patient feel unimportant? Let him/her see you texting or talking on your cell phone in your work area. While most facilities have banned the use of these devices in the workplace, this activity still occurs, particularly when supervisors are not on-site. Patients want to feel you are connecting with them, not with your friends. Besides violating workplace policies, texting in front of patients is seen as the height of rudeness. Chronic texting and cell phone use is juvenile and unprofessional behavior that sheds a poor light on the healthcare worker and the facility alike. Patients have many choices for receiving healthcare and if they find a facility's staff to be unprofessional, rude, or distracted they will go elsewhere for their care. Patients expect healthcare staff to be focused on them, not on a cell phone, smart phone, dumb phone, or any other electronic device unless the purpose of the device is for their healthcare.



We all get nervous from time to time when confronted with a rather intimidating patient or a task that is unfamiliar or that we don't do often. The last thing you want to do is show that you are nervous. A nervous-appearing healthcare worker will cause the patient to become worried about the quality of care they are about to receive. Patients who are already anxiety-ridden about an impending procedure need to see a professional who exudes confidence and skill. If you are not skilled at the task involved, get help. If you are skilled but still feel nervous, take a moment out of the patient's sight to go through the procedure in your head, take a deep breath, and go in there smiling and looking confident.



## Non-verbal Communication – What Message Are You Conveying? #3235

### Test Your Knowledge

1. A patient's first impression of the lab is most often related to:
  - a) the appearance, mannerisms, and speech of the healthcare worker
  - b) the difficulty of finding the laboratory department
  - c) the cost of having laboratory tests done
2. A "hands on the hips" posture conveys a message of:
  - a) open, friendly, and approachable
  - b) anger, irritation, and impatience
  - c) flexible, personable, and patient
3. How will a patient most likely react to a healthcare worker who is obviously nervous?
  - a) the patient will be understanding because the healthcare worker is new
  - b) the patient will be anxious and concerned about the quality of care they will receive
  - c) the patient will offer words of encouragement
4. Texting and cell phone use in the work area makes the following impression on patients:
  - a) patients frequently use cell phones and text themselves and think nothing of it
  - b) patients won't care as long as they receive fast service
  - c) patients see this as unprofessional and the height of rudeness
5. Scrub pants that touch the floor :
  - a) are unprofessional in appearance and an infection control nightmare
  - b) protect the skin on the ankles and lower legs from exposure to pathogens
  - c) are the correct length for wearing in the healthcare setting
6. Rolling of the eyes, finger or toe tapping, sighing, lack of eye contact, and looking elsewhere are examples of:
  - a) friendliness
  - b) impatience or irritation
  - c) good communication
7. What impression is projected by a cluttered, dirty, or disorganized work station, cart, or phlebotomy tray?
  - a) the lab and hospital must also be disorganized, cluttered, or dirty
  - b) the patient doesn't care as long as the phlebotomist gets the blood
  - c) the phlebotomist is efficient and focused on the patient

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Facility/Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Dept: \_\_\_\_\_