

Enhance the patient experience

Training in NLP can provide you with the tools to effectively develop a rapport with your patients.

Lynne Rees* explains.

Dealing with patients

NLP, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming, could help tomorrow's dental care professionals (DCPs) gain CPD and make the job of dealing with patients easier.

The DCP as we know is an essential member of the dental team performing a variety of roles. One of the most important of those roles involves front line duties looking after the needs and expectations of the patient.

Ah, the patient ... a gentle giant ... scared little rabbit ... overbearing bully ... placid pussycat ... demanding rottweiler, and all that in the space of 15 minutes in some cases! How do you cope? Well NLP can help you to develop the tools to think and communicate more effectively with these varying personalities. It will focus on communication and change.

Neuro relates to our neurological system and the way we experience the world using our senses. It translates a variety of sensory information into conscious and unconscious thought processes. These thought processes affect our physiology, emotions and behaviour.

Linguistic makes reference to the use of language. It allows us to communicate our experiences of the world and how we perceive it. The words we speak will also influence our experience.

Programming is something we do internally. We code our experiences and we use our thinking patterns to enable us to problem solve, make decisions, evaluate, learn and improve. We do not always consciously realise

that this is taking place. Nor do we realise that we have it within us to recode our experiences and organise our internal programming in order to achieve a more acceptable outcome.

Rapport

Rapport between the DCP and the patient is important if the working relationship is to be successful. The patient needs to feel confident in the practice team, comfortable with the situation and trust that the practitioners are knowledgeable.

The use of language is important when developing a rapport with the patient. Although we may all speak the same language the words we use may cause a mismatch with the patient. If the DCP is a visual person using phrases such as 'I see what you mean', or 'see it from my point of view' and the patient a more auditory person who uses phrases such as 'I hear what you say', or 'you aren't listening to me', then rapport will not be as effective. It is important that DCPs are aware of the words they use in order that they do not install negative feelings within the patient.



NLP benefits

NLP can have many benefits for the DCP and the team. Effective use of NLP techniques will improve the rapport with patients leading to improved patient care. It is an opportunity to help your patient overcome what for some is an 'emotionally-laden' experience. That visit to the dentist may trigger negative emotions resulting from years of bad experiences. It may create enormous stress for the patient, as a result of one bad experience as a child. You could be the one who helps them to overcome this stress once and for all.

From the patient's perspective the NLP skill of communication will reassure them and help them to fight their fears and phobias as well as managing their stress levels. You will be gaining their trust, assisting engagement and

continued engagement with the practice, attending appointments and complying with therapy.

The linguistic skills are a powerful tool and will

allow the DCP the insight into patient problems and in gathering valuable information needed to make an improved assessment. This will enhance the patient experience.

Patient experience

Clearly the patient experience is important for practitioners developing private practice. It is also important, if not more important, in the context of patient compliance with preventative regimes for improved oral health. The latter is particularly applicable in reducing oral health inequalities. We all know the 80:20 rule in that 80% of the disease is found in 20% of the population. The diseased 20% is usually but not exclusively found in deprived sub-groups. This will therefore be very useful to the types of practice the NHS wants to support.

Team harmony

Not only can NLP help with more effective interactions with patients, but it can also be useful within organisation to improve staff well being. DCPs are often so involved with helping others that they forget that carers need to be cared for too. Team harmony is important to all, with happy teams enjoying work more. Work life balance is important and while full time staff spend a reasonable proportion of their time in work, that time should be

enjoyable. These skills will assist everyone in their quest for practice excellence.

So NLP has got something for everyone – patients, practice and indirectly the communities we serve. To date NLP training is not universally undertaken in dental practice, however, there is a potential to incorporate this useful skill through the mechanism of CPD for the dental team.

For more information see the Mind Relief website: www.mindrelief.co.uk or email info@mindrelief.co.uk. Telephone Lynne Rees on 01792 366028.

"Lynne Rees is the owner of Mind Relief, a qualified NLP Practitioner and holds a PGCE in teaching. Mind Relief offers training courses to assist the DCP, to develop improved skills in rapport using NLP techniques. Having spent many years in the further education sector Lynne decided to set up her own business and offers a range of courses in which she has embedded the skills of NLP. She is no stranger to the behaviours of the public as she spent many years working in management in the retail sector. Lynne believes: 'We are all complex and carry around with us many issues that can manifest themselves in a variety of behaviours. With regard to our limiting behaviours such as fears and phobias, we are well placed to overcome them, we just don't realise it! That is why NLP techniques are so important to us all if we just allow time to learn them.'

