Did you know that your communication could unintentionally harm – seriously ill – patients?

See the table with more examples that are not supportive for patients and alternatives that are helpful. Scan this QR code for a link to the scientific study and more harmful and helpful examples.

**Making vague promises**

Vague promises are unsettling, especially if they are not met.

- **Harmful example**
  - “I will call you.”
  - (no indication of when the doctor will call)

- **Helpful example**
  - “I will call you tomorrow between 4 and 5, once I have discussed this with the team. If I don’t call, you can call me after that.”

**Empathy**

Giving a compliment without room to disagree

Telling patients they look good is perceived as harmful; this occurs in daily life, and may not reflect how the patient feels.

- **Harmful example**
  - “You look great.”

- **Helpful example**
  - “You look great, but I know that doesn’t always mean you feel that way. How do you feel?”

**Not seeing the patient as a person**

Not seeing the patient as a person and only focusing on the medical facts / the medical side is deemed harmful.

- **Harmful example**
  - “The tumor doesn’t seem to be growing so that’s going well - great! So we’ll continue treatment.”

- **Helpful example**
  - “The tumor doesn’t seem to be growing, which is good. But how are you feeling? Do you have any symptoms?”

**Exploration — Asking the patient**

- Asking what the patient knows: “So what do you know about chemotherapy?”

- Asking what the patient wants to do, or to achieve: “What would you like the treatment to achieve?”

- Asking probing questions if the patient is experiencing complaints: “Where is the pain? When do you experience it? How often?”

- Asking/checking if the patient has understood the information: “I want to check that I’ve explained it properly. Can you repeat what I said?”

- Making time for questions: “Do you have any more questions?”

**Decision-making**

Not involving the patient in decision-making

Being too directive and overlooking patients in decision-making. Patients’ views vary on who should make a final treatment decision.

- **Harmful example**
  - “You have a choice between chemotherapy and … The advantages and disadvantages are … I would be very interested to know what you yourself think about this. Of course there is time to think about it.”

- **Helpful example**
  - “You must start chemo within a specified time.”

**Exploration**