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General practitioners' perspectives on tailored communication skills trainings – results from focus groups in Germany

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Background & Aim: The quality of communication between general practitioners (GPs) and patients has a significant impact on treatment outcomes of patients and on job satisfaction of GPs. This DFG-funded research project aims at developing a training course supporting the GPs in Germany in aligning their communication with patients more closely to patients' needs and make consultations more effective. As part of the training development the current GPs' perspectives on demands for communication skills trainings have been investigated.

Method: Focus groups with GPs were conducted on the experiences with everyday consultations and patient-doctor communication. Discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The material was analysed using content analysis. A multi-professional research team developed a coding system which was then applied to the entire material independently by two researchers. Data organisation and analysis was conducted computer assisted (MAXQDA).

Results: Seven group discussions were executed in the North, East and West of Germany with in total of 45 participants. Emerging themes in the discussions were (1) the need for effective communication techniques to organise the consultation due to time constraints; (2) the importance of a trustful relationship; (3) dealing with challenging patients. GPs emphasised their professional role as patients' advocates and felt responsible for accompanying patients through the health care system in order to avoid oversupply of medical treatment. Communication plays an important role in relation to health education, information and enhancing the patients' health behaviour.

Conclusion: Strategies to addressing patients individually and focusing on patients' resources can be deduced as central in the development of communication training. At the same time restrictions in general practice routine should be considered. A differentiated training approach should be offered in which time-efficient, patient-oriented and non-verbal communication techniques are taught and practiced.