

Cultural Awareness Guidance for Surgeons
Written and produced by Dr Margaret Murphy

FURTHER ANALYSIS - MODULE 3 'Power and Status'

Power and Status

Below is Table 1 showing the actions and interactions of the consultant, both verbal and non-verbal (Column 1), the language spoken by consultant (Column 2) and the resultant positive effects this language has on the trainee (Column 3). The positive effects of the language demonstrate the appropriate cultural awareness of the consultant.

TABLE

Demonstrable Action/Interaction	Example from Script	Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains direct eye-contact 	<i>-Consultant makes direct eye contact with trainee</i> <i>-Consultant, smiling, maintains eye contact with trainee...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces social distances between trainer and trainee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts phone away 	<i>-....and puts her phone away upon entering the theatre.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates commitment to trainee. Creates better interaction as it shows trainee her dialogue is important.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stands next to trainee 	<i>-Consultant walks around and stands next to trainee.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows inclusivity, reduces social distance, equalises power and status, raises comfort levels of trainee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smiles 	<i>-Consultant, smiling, maintains eye contact with trainee)...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces social distance and power differences, and allows trainee to feel more comfortable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates procedure 	<i>-OK, let me show you how to use it.....</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows willingness to teach, and to ensure trainee has understood. Reduces tension.

	<p><i>-just... like this(consultant demonstrates to trainee correct way to gently insert the needle).....</i></p> <p><i>-Consultant takes needle and demonstrates to trainee the correct method of applying it and where.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paraphrases, repeats back 	<p><i>-So, you see – that is how to create the pneumoperitoneum</i></p> <p><i>-Would that be OK?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows empathy of trainee's situation. Demonstrates willingness of consultant to teach trainee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checks understanding 	<p><i>- Have I explained that clearly?</i></p> <p><i>-Are you sure? You don't seem that sure.</i></p> <p><i>-Are you familiar with this needle and how to use it?</i></p> <p><i>-Is there something I can help with?</i></p> <p><i>-That is not good – do you know why this is so?</i></p> <p><i>- Do you know why?</i></p> <p><i>- Do you have any questions?</i></p> <p><i>- Would that be OK?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows sensitivity/awareness about levels of understanding of trainee. Encourages trainee to ask for clarifications of any misunderstandings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives explanations 	<p><i>- It's becauseit will make the creation of the pneumoperitoneum more difficult.</i></p> <p><i>-It's important to check the level of saline before connecting the insufflator and turning on the gas</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows empathy for trainee's processes of understanding. Shows willingness to teach. Reduces social distances. Reduces tension of trainee.

	<i>-I will explain</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks prior knowledge 	<p><i>-Are you familiar with this needle and how to use it?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows willingness to teach trainee, and to ensure trainee has understood and to ensure teaching can easily add onto prior knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays patience and clear speech 	<p><i>-Consultant gives explanations using slow, clear voice, and checking with eye-contact to make sure trainee understands.</i></p> <p><i>-Have I explained that clearly?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages trainee and gives trainee time to ask for clarifications of any uncertainties or misunderstandings. • Clarifies and aids understanding, reduces discomfort levels of trainee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses positive language 	<p><i>-That's good...</i></p> <p><i>-I'd like you to insert the Verres needle.....</i></p> <p><i>-Yes, I will help you</i></p> <p><i>-Would that be OK?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates inclusivity and raises confidence in trainee. • Reduces power differences. • Gives compliments to trainee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks open questions 	<p><i>-Is there something I can help with?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows willingness to teach trainee, and to ensure trainee has understood and to ensure teaching can easily add onto prior knowledge. • Encourages trainee to ask for clarifications of any misunderstandings. • Aids inclusivity and flattens hierarchies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses inclusive language 	<p><i>- Consultant is keen to hear trainee's response....</i></p> <p><i>-Is there something I can help with?</i></p> <p><i>-Yes, I will help you</i></p> <p><i>- Would that be OK?</i></p> <p><i>- You can observe and ask me anything while I'm doing it</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates inclusivity and raises confidence in trainee • Reduces power differences and status distances • Aids inclusivity and flattens hierarchies. • Creates feelings of team-work.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

In this Scenario, the trainee, though living and working in the UK, was born and raised in India. There are two cultural attributes of Indian culture, which may play a significant role in the interactions.

The first is the reluctance of the trainee to ask for clarification when she does not fully understand. This occurs when the consultant asks her to insert the Verres needle and to reduce the insufflation pressure. The trainee does not ask for more information. She does not admit either, that she does not know how to do these tasks. The trainee does not fully understand the message, but instead of admitting this and asking for help, she instead looks down and does not speak. In Indian culture, if a message or command is delivered, especially by someone of a higher status, which is not fully understood, the receiver will in most cases, feign understanding and readily agree. Requests for clarification, elaboration or admissions of inability will rarely be forthcoming. Additionally, the consultant may be used to her own cultural concept of the 'truth' whereby she would expect requests for clarification and elaboration if her clearly stated intentions and meanings were not fully understood by the trainee. The consultant would also expect the trainee to admit to her that she did not know how to do a task.

In the Indian culture, by contrast, there exists a certain tolerance for unexplained and uncertain events. A core value of Asian cultures is to preserve harmony, so it may be that asking for clarification or elaboration could be seen by the trainee as confronting, thereby risking the superficial harmony that currently exists between them. This may explain why the trainee does not clarify what the consultant has asked her to do. The trainee as well, may risk losing face by admitting that she does not know how to insert a Verres needle or reduce insufflation pressure, especially to someone of a higher status. Instead, the trainee remains silent to protect her face and preserve her personal reputation. The culturally aware consultant realises this and gives further explanation regardless. The culturally aware consultant also realises that the trainee may have difficulty admitting inability to do a task, so she gives him face-saving line of escape, that is, she shows the trainee how to use the Verres needle and reduce insufflation pressure regardless.

The second cultural attribute affecting the interaction in Scenario 1 is the reluctance of the trainee to ask any questions of the consultant. This could be explained by the power difference between the two. In Asian cultures, challenging the authority of someone in a higher power position even by asking a simple question is not acceptable. An Asian trainee would therefore feel uncomfortable challenging the consultant with a direct question. Levels of interactivity between people in differing power positions are therefore low. In this scenario, the trainee's position is one of respecting authority and the higher status of the consultant. She may not feel comfortable asking for information or advice because the consultant is the one in 'authority'. The culturally aware consultant, with careful and sensitive questioning, has created a safe environment for the trainee to begin to ask questions at the end of the interaction (*Trainee: But I am still not sure how to reduce the insufflation pressure. Could you show me how to do this?*). The consultant therefore has managed to reduce the power differences between them and raise comfort levels to an extent to allow for meaningful interaction.

END