



Psychology Awareness 2021

Issue # 2

“My patient isn’t following my advice. What can I do?”

MYTH:

My patient is just not listening to our recommendations. If they did they would get better!

FACT:

Patients have their own motivation for change. Telling them what to do without asking what motivates them can lead to non-adherence.

Non-adherence is an important challenge in public health:



5% of hospital visits are due to non-adherence.



30% of prescriptions are never filled. 50% are not taken as prescribed.



1 in 4 patients do not follow their medical regimen.

Single-focus interventions (e.g., reminders to take medication) can be helpful. Comprehensive interventions that target cognitive, behavioural, and emotional barriers to motivation can lead to even greater treatment adherence. **Psychologists have extensive training in evidence-based therapies such as CBT and Motivational Interviewing that focus on behaviour change.**

How can I talk to my patients about non-adherence?

1. Understand why a patient is not following recommendations. Ask them to discuss treatment goals, questions, concerns or obstacles to adherence in their own words.
2. Patients are more likely to communicate their concerns if they feel comfortable doing so. Ask open-ended and neutral questions, like: “It’s difficult to do all these exercises regularly. How have you been managing?” or “Not everyone takes their medicine every single day, how about you?”
3. Explore their reasons for change. What motivated them to seek treatment? Identifying motivations for change can make follow-through more likely.
4. Consult with a psychologist if non-adherence persists.