Communicate
Patient-centered care requires individualized tactics

WHITNEY J. PALMER | Staff Correspondent

For many dermatologists, successfully treating patients means taking a more patient-centered approach to care. According to Neil Prose, M.D., a pediatric dermatologist with Duke University Medical Center, you can employ tactics to individualize the care you provide. "What you do cannot only focus on the conditions you’re treating, but also on how your patients feel and what their goals are," he said. "Treating a dermatology condition isn’t a one-size-fits-all matter."

#2 ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:
Avoid yes-or-no questions. Questions such as, “How have you been since our last visit?” or, “What new issues have developed?” can provide more information and help you with diagnosis.

#3 RESPECT THE PATIENT:
Learn about your patient’s personal preferences and limitations, and take them into account when planning a treatment protocol. Being mindful of their individual or cultural values can help you design a good treatment strategy and make your patient more comfortable.

#4 INVOLVE THE PATIENT:
Get his or her feedback throughout the appointment. Do they understand what you’re explaining? What are their goals? Include him or her in designing the treatment regimen to ensure greater compliance.

#5 ADDRESS PATIENT DISCOMFORT:
Don’t just quickly prescribe new medication. Discuss what your patient is feeling, including itching, dryness, or pain.

#6 ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTIONS:
Address your patient’s emotions before explaining how you’ll treat the problem. Tell them you hear their disappointment, frustration, or confusion if a treatment failed. Let them know other patients have similar experiences so they don’t feel alone. Also, address any concerns they might have about how their condition could impact their family and friends.

#7 COORDINATE CARE:
You aren’t your patient’s only provider. Work closely with other doctors, ancillary, and support services so they’re aware of your patient’s dermatology needs. Additionally, design a seamless office workflow so your patient’s experience from check-in to check-out is problem-free as possible.

#8 OFFER GUIDANCE:
Give your patients the direction they need to be successful with managing their condition. Discuss medication usage, side effects, and what services are available after the appointment. They should know who to call if any problems arise.

#9 INVITE QUESTIONS:
Ask what questions your patients have — not if they have any. Let them know you assume they’re questioning something and that it’s okay to ask about it.

#10 PROVIDE INFORMATION:
Offer as much information as you can about your patient’s condition, care, and prognosis. Explain the treatment process thoroughly and teach your patient strategies on how to manage their condition at home with medication or other self-care techniques.

#11 SIMPLIFY ELECTRONIC RECORDS:
Make sure notes in the patient’s electronic health record (EHR) are clear and understandable as possible. This makes it easier for your patient and other providers to understand the dermatology treatment. Also, encourage your patients to see their EHR and use it as a method to foster communication and discussion with you.

#1 USE OPEN BODY LANGUAGE:
Sit with your patient. Don’t stand. Make eye contact as much as possible so the patient knows you’re listening. Sit with your patient. Don’t stand. Make eye contact as much as possible so the patient knows you’re listening.