

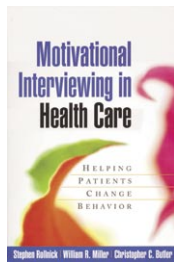
Book Review

Motivational Interviewing in Health Care: Helping patients change behaviour

By Stephen Rollnick, William Miller, Christopher Butler

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To the Editor: This book presents the latest thinking on motivational interviewing (MI) by Steve Rollnick, Bill Miller and Chris Butler and is aimed at the wide variety of healthcare workers who engage with patients about lifestyle or behaviour change. In the South African context, with our quadruple burden of disease from HIV, chronic disorders, poverty-related conditions and trauma, it is easy to see the importance of conversations about sexual behaviour, adherence, obesity, as well as smoking, alcohol and other substance abuse.

This book moves away from seeing the directing communication style as always inappropriate in the consultation and recognises that the consultation may entail the three fundamental communication styles of directing, guiding and following. Each style has a place, but problems arise when there is incongruence between the style and the task at hand. Practitioners should be skilful in flexibly moving between these styles depending on whether, for example, they are listening to the patient's story, breaking bad news, giving explanations or making mutual decisions. When it comes to behaviour change, the book argues that motivational interviewing, a refined form of the guiding style, is the most appropriate style.

Asking, listening and informing are presented as three categories of communication skills common to all three styles of communication. However, each style differs in the frequency with which the skills are used and in the way they are utilised. For example the directing style is dominated by informing and asking, with little listening. Asking in a directing style often involves more closed questions that are designed to elicit crucial information regarding the diagnosis or emergency. Poor directing is often confrontational, authoritarian and done with little collaboration.

The book presents MI using this framework and emphasises key concepts such as resolving ambivalence, eliciting "change talk" and

avoiding the "righting reflex". Motivation is not seen as a fixed trait of the patient but a factor that can be influenced in the context of a relationship. Motivation can be influenced by the way in which you talk or interact. The MI interaction is characterised by a spirit of collaborative inquiry and decision making, respect for autonomy and purposeful evocation of the patient's own motivation to change. Active listening skills and particularly the ability to form reflections are crucial; along with a genuine belief in the patient's ability to change and formulate his or her own solutions.

There are useful chapters on asking, listening and informing skills that begin with general comments and then focus on specific skills and strategies for MI. The chapters are well illustrated with examples of dialogue from different settings. This book also recognises the potential problems caused by incongruence between the characteristics of the healthcare system and the spirit of MI. A number of case studies are given that relate ways in which health services have transformed themselves so that patients' experience of the service is resonant with the respectful and collaborative nature of MI.

Overall the book reformulates the skills and strategies in a framework that relates more closely to the underlying consultation process. MI is seen as building on a guiding style with specific skills and strategies that the practitioner already has some experience of, rather than as a completely new type of psychotherapy. The book does not re-iterate the "roadmap" for the MI process that was used in the earlier book *Health Behaviour Change* in 1999 and I suspect that the authors felt this process was too prescriptive, however, for a novice MI practitioner it may be helpful to have such a process in mind.

The book has value for family physicians, general practitioners and registrars who are interested in improving their communication skills, particularly in the area of brief behaviour change counselling. The simple yet powerful concepts regarding communication styles and skills will also be useful for teachers of communication skills.

Interested readers in South Africa can connect with a local network of MI practitioners, trainers and researchers at <http://www.sahealthinfo.org> and with the international network at <http://www.motivationalinterview.org>.

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