

The Importance of Emotional Intelligence



In our practices, we often emphasize the significance of IQ—both *intelligence quotient* and *image quality*—in terms of understanding the technology available for managing eye conditions and matching each patient with the appropriate treatment based on their eye health. What is often underdiscussed is the crucial role that emotional intelligence plays in understanding and addressing the needs and wants of our patients. Emotional intelligence dictates how well we communicate with patients; it enhances our ability to listen and respond appropriately; it empowers patients to make informed decisions for their care.

Emotional intelligence skills are rarely taught explicitly but rather honed through time and experience. Because of the brevity of our interactions with patients, perfecting our emotional intelligence is challenging. All of us can recall instances when we could have better handled a patient interaction had we recognized a particular personality trait earlier or communicated more effectively. Patient feedback such as “You never told me I had astigmatism” and misunderstandings about their postoperative need for readers indicate our emotional intelligence and communication did not fully meet their expectations.

Addressing the needs of unhappy or dissatisfied patients is perhaps the most demanding test of our emotional intelligence. The situation

can trigger emotional responses from the patient and us. Our instinct might be to withdraw or hope the issue resolves itself, but this approach seldom works. Learning from each other how to communicate better and manage difficult patient interactions can enhance our capabilities and improve patient satisfaction.

Emotional intelligence extends beyond patient interactions to our dealings with colleagues and staff and the broader business aspects of our practices. How we manage relationships within our practice, with our industry partners, and even with our competitors affects our overall success. Emotional intelligence helps us navigate these relationships effectively.

Whether we are physically demonstrating our partnership with an unhappy patient by sitting side by side with them to review their condition or ensuring our body language is open and inviting, strong emotional intelligence can enhance our practice of medicine. The goal is not just to deliver medical care but also to build trust and a rapport with those we serve. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cathleen M. McCabe".

CATHLEEN M. MCCABE, MD
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