

Book Review

Talking with Patients, vol. 1: The Theory of Doctor-Patient Communication
vol. 2: Clinical Technique

By Eric J. Cassell, Published by MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 17.95/volume

These books explain how skills comprising the *art* of medicine -- knowing how sick people (and doctors) behave, utilizing both communication and the doctor-patient relationship for therapeutic ends, and having the ability to obtain and integrate subjective and objective data -- are important to medical practice. Because some doctors are inherently more skilled in this arena than others, many think these skills are unteachable. Cassell, a physician practicing in New York, disagrees. He believes that they are teachable and, in these two volumes, utilizes analyses of conversations between doctors and patients to do just that.

In his first volume, Cassell discusses verbal and nonverbal forms of communication and how the meanings of diseases, to the patients experiencing them, often results in illnesses that are unique to each. In the second volume, he shows how physicians can discover these meanings. Material for these books was drawn from hundreds of hours of unscripted, audio-taped medical encounters that took place between more than 800 patients and their (mostly) privately practicing physicians. While intended for physicians, both volumes are a valuable resource for all healthcare professionals who interact with patients.

Reviewed by Judith A. Greenfield, PhD, RN, contributing editor of the *Healthcare Communication Review* and President of the Healthcare Communication Project, Inc.

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