

## Some Ideas about using Personal Pronouns

### Consulting: opening phrase

Commonly used opening phrases include:

- ~~How can I help you?~~
- ~~What can I do for you?~~

Consider possible hidden meanings: hierarchy, there is indeed a fixable problem, the doctor can do something. Note that this question invites the patient to move directly to management and completely bypass gathering of information!

Consider alternatives eg “What would you like to discuss?”

### Consulting: discussing a third person

A patient may talk about a third person, for example about a relative who is doing things that the patient does not like. It is easy to have a long discussion about this by asking questions containing ‘she/he’.

We can focus on the patient’s feelings, concerns etc by asking ‘you’ questions:

- How is this affecting **you**?
- How are **you** feeling about all this?
- What have **you** tried to do to help so far?

### Consulting: establishing concerns

One technique is to use a microskill ‘my friend Jan’ with a sequence of pronouns. ‘I... they... you... we...’.

For example, “I see lots of people with X, they are worried about it, you seem worried, we could...”

### Consulting: shared decision-making

Doctors sometimes use phrases such as:

- ~~I think we should...~~
- ~~I’m going to arrange an x-ray...~~
- ~~What I think we should do is...~~

We can encourage discussion and patient involvement by using phrases containing ‘you’, for example:

- Which of these options would **you** prefer?
- How would **you** like to take things forward?

### Teaching: a case discussion is different from a case-based discussion (CBD)

During a case discussion, the ES and Registrar will usually be talking mainly about the patient, using the pronoun ‘she’ or ‘he’.

During a **Case-Based Discussion**, rather than focussing on the patient narrative, the ES explores the Registrar’s critical reasoning processes, and feelings, something effectively done by using ‘**you**’ questions:

- What were **your** options at this point?
- Who else did **you** contact?
- How did **you** feel about that?
- How did **you** deal with **your** uncertainty?

### Eportfolio Registrar entries: patient narratives

Registrars sometimes spend a lot of time writing narratives about what the patient did, saying ‘he/she...’

The ES can encourage the Registrar to write more about how the case affected them, by writing ‘I’.

It is often effective for the Registrar to write in the e-portfolio log entry boxes in reverse order. This encourages them to write about feelings, thoughts, concerns, learning points, future learning, etc, and afterwards fill in the first box with a brief narrative.

### E portfolio Supervisor entries

If the supervisor comments about the patient, using ‘she’ or ‘he’ this is commenting on the case.

Instead, the supervisor can comment about the Registrar, saying things like:

- **You** have reflected on the importance of...
- **You** noted how you felt uncomfortable, and dealt with this by...

## Gender neutral words including pronouns

We now avoid terms such as fireman, headmaster, chairman, and instead use terms such as firefighter, headteacher, chairperson or chair. When using personal pronouns there is a tendency to use 'he' even when we do not wish to imply maleness.

We can take care to use appropriate pronouns and promote gender equality. Some ideas are:

	Subject	Object	Possessive	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
Male singular	He works	I called him	His book	That is his	He draws himself
Female singular	She works	I called her	Her book	That is hers	She draws herself
<b>Male or female singular</b>	<b>They</b> work	I called them	Their book	That is theirs	They draw themselves
Invented pronouns					
<b>Male or female singular</b>	<b>Ze</b> works	I called zir	Zir book	That is zirs	Ze draws zirsself

## Transgender people

Consider which pronoun is appropriate and be especially sensitive around times of change.

Some people prefer 'they' as a singular pronoun.

**Ask** the person which pronouns they prefer.

## Communication aided by not using pronouns

In some critical situations, eg operating theatre or urgent communication about a critical situation, if we use pronouns such as she/he/it this can cause miscommunication. For example, the wrong patient or body part may be assumed because she/he/it is not specified clearly. In such situations, it is better to use the patient's name and body part etc and avoid using pronouns.

## Summary

Opening Phrase	'I' focuses on the doctor	'you' focuses on the patient
Consulting: gathering information	'she/he' focuses on a third person	'you' focuses on the patient
Consulting: discussing management	'I' gives doctor's view	'you' encourages patient's view
Case based discussion	'she/he' focuses on the patient	'you' explores the Registrar's thinking
Eportfolio log entries	'she/he' describes narrative	'I' encourages reflections
Eportfolio comments	'she/he' refers to the case	'you' comments on the Registrar's reflections
Unknown gender	'he' may falsely imply male	'she/he', 'they' as a singular, 'ze', etc are other options
Transgender people	Inappropriate gender pronouns may cause distress	Ask the person for their preferred pronouns

## My personal reflections

How will I use these ideas in my own work?