Process of counselling

Beginning of counselling session (introduction): As the patient enters the room, greet the person, call the person by name, welcome the client and make him/her comfortable. Introduce yourself if meeting for the first time and tell the person the purpose of the meeting (to understand the health problem and its best management). Encourage the counselee to talk about themselves.

1. **Active attending or Listening:** It is most important step in counselling because the details provided by the client are based on it. Active listening means listening carefully and paying attention to verbal as well as non-verbal signals.

   Provide in-depth information to relieve fears and worries of the client. Similarly, counsellor’s words, expression and posture/gesture (verbal/non-verbal communication) indicate that attention is being paid to what is being said. By demonstrating an attending behaviour we enhance the client’s self-respect, establish a safe atmosphere and facilitate free expression of thought by the counselee. Active listening includes reflection of feelings, questioning, paraphrasing and clarification.

   Similarly, actions of the counselee communicate many unexpressed feeling. Some of these nonverbal activities are counselee entering the room, **Voice quality, Breathing, Eyes, Facial expressions, Leg movement & Body posture**

   **Reflection of content and Feelings:** People respond differently to their illness. They may express their feelings as fear, anger, anxiety or sadness about disease. E.g. depression may be expressed as short temper, Irritable behaviour, less interest in daily routine, inability to sleep, loss of weight and feeling of worthlessness and anxiety. Do not try to stop, let the person express their feelings, do not stop patient/family members from crying. Do not take anger personally and try to stay calm.

   The counsellor must recognize such feelings in a direct, unemotional way. The focus is kept on the emotions of the client and his/her subjective experiences in coping with the situation.

   Counsellor reflects the contents and feeling of the other persons by responding back to the client and communicating a message through empathy, questioning or paraphrasing that conveys that counsellor is listening and trying to understand counselee’s circumstances.

   **Questioning:** Always try to use questions and establish communications so that both the problem and the solutions are clear. Asks questions in order to clarify the situation.
and make client aware of all the dimensions of the problem and help the clients to understand the core issue underlying his/her fears or concerns. Do not ask too many closed question (closed questions are those questions that can be answered by one word like yes /no). Ask open questions to make communication easier, encourage further discussion and facilitate building of trust and warmth in the relationships.

Use questions containing why with caution as it may easily sound judgmental. If you need to use ‘why’, use it in the middle of a sentence and not in the beginning of a sentence.

**Paraphrasing and clarification:** Paraphrasing is repetition of the jest of client’s feelings by the counsellor in their own words. For example, “You seem to be saying that you are afraid that your family is not going to take care of you”. The clients might then agree with the interpretation. If not, the counsellor can seek clarification by saying “will you please explain it with more details?” Utilizing this technique, the counsellor attempts to give feedback to the client; the essence or content of what the client has just said and clarifies understanding of the client’s world. Clarification helps the client to come to understand themselves better. When you ask the client to explain something in more details or in a different way; by doing this clients not only explore their own feelings further, but will also feel that you are trying hard to understand their situation. In the process, counsellors also tell the client about the scientific facts not known to them.

**II Interpretation:** Often people avoid focusing on the real problem and talk around the issue. Interpretation goes beyond what is explicitly expressed by the feelings and implied meanings of the client’s statements. Even client is unaware of this. Counsellor redefines the problem from a different point of view to bring out more clarity to the problem and make client aware to the core problem. The counsellor also helps client to establish what is relevant, emphasising the important points – for example, “Of all the things you talked about today, it seems to me you are most concerned about....”

**III Repeating:** At times of stress and crisis, clients are in a state of denial or feeling overwhelmed. They may not always understand everything they are told. As a counsellor, do not hesitate and repeat salient points of the discussion, statements of support or necessary facts. It ensures that the clients clearly understand the problem and requisite action. Client would usually convey that they understand and accept the information.

**IV Summarizing:** Many people who are stunned by news of the disease may respond by talking quickly and trying to provide more details or ask more questions; than counsellor can absorb or comprehend. It is then helpful for the counsellor to interrupt at times and summarize what has been said. This is like paraphrasing and helps to ensure that each understands the other correctly. Summarizing towards the end of the counselling provides guidance and direction to both counsellor and counselee; to deal with practical matters of the problem and decide plan of action. A summary resembles a combination of reflection of feeling and paraphrasing over a longer period of time. At the end of each session, the
counsellor should summarize the salient points of the discussion, highlight decisions which have been made and need to be acted on.

V Confrontation: Many a time’s clients are so much preoccupied with their fears that cannot see the connection between their behaviour and the responses of the others. Confrontation involves a direct examination of incongruities and discrepancies in the client’s thinking, feeling and/or behaviour. The counsellor tells the client that how their thoughts affect their action and behaviour, which in turn affect the behaviour of others towards them. E.g. Because of fear of discrimination, people withdraw themselves and do not speak to friends and relatives. Friends and relatives in turn also respond by not talking to them. Establishment of strong relationship and rapport is essential before commenting on such issues. It is a highly intrusive skill hence timing is very important and advice on confrontation must be delivered in an atmosphere of warmth, care and concern.

VI Respecting: As a counsellor, try to appreciate that people see their problems in unique personal ways determined by culture, social class and personality. Respect client’s views and beliefs and build on them. Show respect, for instance, by asking a client to explain different aspects of the culture or personal beliefs that are strange to you; for example, “you feel strongly about this. I don’t know about it. Tell me more about it”.

VII Structuring or Prioritization: Structuring means helping the client to see relationship between facts and feelings. It helps clients to determine the important aspects of their concern that needs immediate attention and other less important aspects that can be put off until later. It is essential part of planning and probably one of the most critical skills in counselling.

VIII Deciding Plan of action: Based on the scientific knowledge, cultural and socio-economic aspect of the client, help the client to explore all the possible solution for the prioritised aspect and choose the most relevant option for action. Encourage client to take their own decision and act accordingly.

IX Concluding a counselling session: While ending the session summarize the salient points and decision taken, congratulate client for their efforts, wish them luck and fix next visit.