

Open-ended Questions are those questions which invite the patient to expand their answer. They are broad and require more than one or two word responses.

Positives of open-ended questions:

- develop trust,
- are perceived as less threatening,
- allow an unrestrained or free response,
- may be more useful with articulate users.

Negatives of open-ended questions:

- can be time-consuming,
- may result in unnecessary information,
- may require more effort on the part of the user.

Closed Questions invite a short answer, usually “yes” or “no”, or a single word or two. Closed-ended questions can include presuming, probing, or leading questions. They are restrictive in nature.

Positives of closed questions:

- quick
- require little time investment

Negatives of closed questions:

- incomplete responses
- require more time with inarticulate users
- can be leading questions
- can be irritating or threatening
- can result in misleading assumptions/ conclusions about the patient’s needs
- discourage disclosure

How to Use Different Question Styles

The goal of the interview is for the doctor to understand the patient’s problem. The patient needs the opportunity to express their needs and information while the doctor needs to understand the patient’s concerns. In order to achieve this a proper balance of open and closed questions need to be incorporated into the interview and the questions need to be used in the right sequence.

- Begin the interview with open question to get a picture of the problem from the patient’s perspective.
- If necessary, focus the questioning by using specific but still open questions.
- Then, use closed questions to obtain final details the patient may have omitted.

For example: - **Open questions** to introduce an area of inquiry without limiting the response - “Can you tell me about the pain you’re feeling?” “Tell me more about that pain you’ve been feeling.”

More specific but still open questions sharpen the focus, but still allow the patient some leeway in answering - "What makes the pain worse?"

Closed questions limit the response to a narrow field set by the questioner - "are you feeling any pain in you left arm?" "Have you taken your medication?"

References

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