

**POSTER SESSION 3 ABSTRACTS**  
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**Relationship With A Doctor Who Is Medicine: Practices  
of the Highest Performing Physicians by Patient Survey**

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**Background:** The aims of the MD-Patient Communication Study are to determine the best practice communication behaviors of physicians during outpatient clinic visits; and collect physician perspectives on their communication behaviors. Researchers have consistently found that the top predictors of overall patient satisfaction are the quality of the physician-patient relationship and the contributing communications. There is limited understanding however, of the range of specific behaviors in the interaction that are associated with positive and negative patient perceptions and reactions.

**Methods:** In phase 1, we conducted a naturalistic, observational study of 55, Permanente Primary Care physician-patient visits using videotape recordings, and incorporating patient and physician reactions to the tape. The physicians, who practiced in Los Angeles and Honolulu, spanned the three strata of high, medium, and low historical patient satisfaction scores. In phase 2, a standardized six-question set was posed, in semi-structured, 60-minute interviews, to 70 of the highest-performing physicians on this patient survey, including: 22 of the highest performers (top 5%) from the Los Angeles and Honolulu groups; and 33 and 15 respectively, of the highest performing physicians in Portland and Oakland. These interviews were audio taped with permission, transcribed and coded for patterns.

**Results:** This abstract addresses the sixth question: "Do you feel that your relating to your patients is an important part of your treatment of their medical condition? In other words, that, as a doctor, you are part of the medicine, or that you are the medicine?" All of the physicians agreed that, as doctors in a trusting relationship with their patients they are "part of" the medicine in all instances; and 90% agreed that they "are" the medicine in some circumstances. They describe one or more of several activities that qualify as "medicine" and are a required part of medical treatment, including: connection, listening, reassurance and support, touch, knowledge, explanation and education, understanding, insight.

**Conclusions:** As our use of, and dependence on, medical technology increases, knowing that the physician is medicine for the patient - and that creates high patient satisfaction - affirms the value of developing a good relationship, and offers a potent, available alternative to some testing and medications, especially for patients with chronic diseases.