

### Motivational Interviewing (MI) Training for Outreach Staff and Clinicians/Supervisors

#### INTRODUCTION TO MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

In the book, *Motivational Interviewing; Helping People Change*, by Miller and Rollnick, they explain MI as “a way of being with a client/patient, rather than using a set of techniques” This book also serves as a guide for clinicians that assists them in facilitating change in patients dealing with asthma, diabetes, tobacco use, substance abuse, and more.

Motivational Interviewing is not a new concept. It was conceived in the early 1980s when American psychologist, William R. Miller, PhD, described a therapeutic approach he had used with some success for people with alcohol problems.<sup>1</sup>

Motivational interviewing played an important role in a recent research project, Americans in Motion-Healthy Interventions, or AIM-HI (<http://www.americansinmotion.org>). This three-year project gave family physicians and practices a variety of tools and strategies designed to help patients adopt fitness as the treatment of choice for lifestyle conditions. (See “Four Strategies for Promoting Healthy Lifestyles in Your Practice,” FPM, January/February 2011.) The AIM-HI version of fitness involves a non-diet approach to healthy eating, physical activity of choice and a balanced lifestyle focusing on emotional well-being. Despite the non-diet approach, 18 percent of patients enrolled in the project had achieved a 10-pound weight loss after 10 months. 4 Patients also saw improvements in eating habits and increases in physical activity.

One of the physicians participating in the research project, Andy Pasternak, MD, of Silver Sage Family Medicine and Silver Sage Sports Performance in Reno, Nev., practices what he preaches when it comes to fitness. He bikes, skies and qualified for the Boston Marathon. However, being a fitness role model isn’t enough to motivate patients to change. “You really need to get a sense of what their goals and interests are, not what you think they should be. It sounds so simple, but it’s really key. Let the patient set the goals.”

Pasternak recalls a patient who had been a smoker for years. At one visit, he finally asked whether she had ever considered quitting. “When she said she didn’t want to, I just dropped it and moved on,” he said. “Six months later she came back and said, ‘I like the way you approached the topic last time. This time, I think I’m ready to go. I want to quit.’” One side benefit of this approach is that it takes pressure off the physician. “If someone is not even in the contemplation stage, you can move on,” he said. “It’s liberating. Berating them or trying to scare them just takes up your time and energy. Let your patients tell you what they want to change.”

Barbara Clure, MD, a research project participant and family physician in a small Native American community in the Northwest, says motivational interviewing has helped empower her patients. “In the past, my patients didn’t want to see me. They didn’t want the lecture,” she said. “Now they are making changes on their own – baby steps that add up to transformational, life-altering changes. Losing weight, quitting smoking, reducing medication – it’s actually happening.” She notes that this patient-directed approach is especially appropriate for the Native American culture. “In the past, the doctor visits seemed conflict driven, and this was especially at odds with the native culture. Now they are more like conversations,” she explains. “If someone is not picking up their medications, I simply say, ‘I’d like to get your input on this. Let’s change it if it’s not working.’ It is amazing how such simple changes in tone can radically change the interaction for the better. It’s so satisfying to talk to my patients now. I know their struggles. I know them.”

Dr. Clure recalls a patient who had refused to go on a diet, so Dr. Clure simply asked, “OK, what would you like to do?” The patient devised her own plan of action and eventually lost weight, got off her medications, left a bad relationship, found a new job and bought a new house – all stimulated by that simple remark in the exam room.