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Positive reinforcement as a tool in medicine and surgery

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ABSTRACT

Patient compliance with treatment is a key issue for many areas of health care, not only does non-compliance reduce the effectiveness of the treatment, but it also represents a substantial cost to many publically-funded health care systems. Promoting increased compliance or co-production of health is a key goal for those forms of treatment that require high levels of active patient participation. These treatments can include pharmacological treatment and physical rehabilitation programmes for a very wide variety of disorders, but the need for co-production is not limited to these areas. The current talk will give an overview of the ways in which physicians and other health care professionals can draw on the principles of behavioural psychology, especially reinforcement, to enhance patient engagement with treatment programmes. It will recognise the limitations of many traditional behavioural (reinforcement-based approaches), and focus on the areas of contingency contracts and self-reinforcement. In particular, it will discuss the processes through which these programmes can be implemented given the practical constraints, such as through diary systems and group sessions. It will also draw on recent development at the ABMU Health Board in Swansea, and at the Luigi Sacco Hospital in Milan, where such procedures have been adopted in outpatients' department.