

Practical tips for formulating a 'graphic narrative'

Images have a special role to play in communication. Via similes and comparisons, the patient's attention can be sparked and emotions engaged or triggered.

Metaphors and imagery aid understanding and can guide expectations in relation to a therapy or the effect of a drug in a positive way, or even shift expectations.

In creating your images, make sure to keep things real for the patients. Try to learn something about their job or hobbies and build on that. Common topics include:

Cars and technology

«If you keep your joints moving, then they won't rust.»

«Your heart is an engine running at full speed, but sometimes it sputters.»

Gardens and nature

«Just as plants need light and water, your immune system also needs important vitamins and trace elements.»

«Your bone marrow is like an elephant because it has a very good long-term memory and can remember everything it has seen before.»

Games and sports

«Show your disease the red card.»

«Your treatment isn't a sprint, it's more like a marathon.»

Fashion and lifestyle

«Think of dieting like clearing out your wardrobe.»

«You need the right medication for every occasion, just like you need the right pair of shoes for every occasion.»

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Another possibility when using metaphors is personification. This involves attributing human characteristics and the ability to act to the body or body parts:

«Your joints love it when they move.»

«Your knees are happy when they're regularly lubricated.»

Similes can consist of just a few words, like «as fast as lightning», «as strong as an ox» or «as sly as a fox» – but can also be many words, half or full sentences.

If you don't have much experience using similes, but you want to take advantage of them as a tool, start off with small steps. You'll see that your repertoire of expressions will expand gradually over time.

Good luck!