

## **An Introduction to the Concept of the Performance Keys**

The Performance Keys are a written document that describe complex clinical communication skills behavior by deconstructing this complexity into its significant component parts. Each page of the document identifies a desired patient-centered communication skill, provides a working definition of that skill and lists examples of how that skill would look in action ( more effective and less effective action). The Performance Keys are intended *to serve as a “toolkit”* for building competency in patient interaction, *not as a blueprint* for construction of identical patient interactions.

Students develop clinical communication skills by observing, practicing, adapting and integrating the patient-centered behaviors identified in the Performance Keys. This practice occurs in the context of ongoing patient interactions and needs to be examined for effectiveness by the developing practitioner. The Performance Keys provide a scaffolding for skill building and reflective practice. The emerging dental student builds the skills of patient-centered practice and critically assesses their implementation through practicing reflectively.

To use another analogy, the Performance Keys are offered as musical notes. These notes can be combined in infinite ways to create an ongoing duet of engagement between the patient and the provider. The Performance Keys are not intended as an archived musical score that must be sequenced and orchestrated identically for each patient. To the contrary, the symphony (or jazz riff ) is in constant dynamic creation with each patient and the score is constantly being adapted to create a unique and meaningful encounter. and provide a foundation for reflective practice in patient interaction.