

# What do you do when you don't know what to do?

## Consult your MUM

(Map of Uncertainty in Medicine)

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### Introduction

Uncertainty pervades medicine; in a linked study we have established that it generates much stress, and may relate to either DIAGNOSTIC dilemmas or MANAGEMENT problems. Moreover, some uncertainties are confined to one doctor patient dyad whereas others involve a wider network or team.

Ways out and ways forwards;

"ways out" displace the doctors' anxiety rather than managing uncertainty effectively

"ways forward" focus doctors' efforts appropriately and identify their learning needs more clearly.

Our MAP OF UNCERTAINTY IN MEDICINE (MUM) classifies uncertainties and helps to identify the skills that will avoid dysfunctional "ways out".

	INDIVIDUAL Dr/Pt	GROUP working with patient
D I A G N O S T I C	<p><b>ANALYSING quadrant</b></p> <p>Diagnosis uncertain; one doctor one patient</p> <p>Ways forwards; application of appropriate "thinking skills" and "self-awareness"</p> <p><b>SKILLS needed;</b> getting better history with focussed strategies including hypothetico-deductive reasoning, develop &amp; test expert heuristics, use of algorithms and clinical decision rules, widening the view, knowing when to stop (when its "good enough"), working through several possibilities etc</p> <p><b>Ways out</b></p> <p>Unfocussed investigations, limited information gathering, falling foul of cognitive biases and errors, blaming the patient or transfer of uncertainty to them, unskilled, dysfunctional consultations</p> <p><b>SETTING</b> needs to enable access to decision and knowledge support, permit prioritisation of problems, promote CME for improving consultation and thinking skills</p>	<p><b>NETWORKING quadrant</b></p> <p>Diagnosis uncertain; doctor gets other services involved</p> <p><b>Ways forwards;</b> precise/targeted use of investigations, referrals &amp; senior colleagues</p> <p><b>SKILLS needed;</b> navigating complex referral &amp; investigation options, skills in eliciting help (e.g. use of SBAR), use of ethical frameworks balancing individual and resource availability, well conducted MDT meetings, ability to network.</p> <p><b>Ways out</b></p> <p>Vague referral that defers responsibility while not being focussed to patient need, excess or dangerous levels of investigations, over medicalisation, passing anxiety or responsibility on to others</p> <p><b>SETTING</b> needs to facilitate discussion and mutual support, encourage informal discussion before referral or investigation and have network/pathway functions clearly set out</p>
M A N A G E M E N T	<p><b>NEGOTIATING quadrant</b></p> <p>Optimum Management uncertain or impossible, usually in one doctor/patient dyad</p> <p><b>Ways forwards;</b> Consultation skills to develop true dialogue with patient and maintain ethical perspective</p> <p><b>SKILLS needed;</b> negotiate incorporate patients ideas, alternatives, motivational interviewing techniques to unblock conflict, managing psychological issues in the patient-doctor relationship, shared decision making skills</p> <p><b>Ways out</b></p> <p>Blaming and labelling patient for non-concordance, conflict, complaints, failure to treat adequately</p> <p><b>SETTING</b> should enable continuous consultation skills development, endorse non first line options when patient refuses, advocate shared decision making.</p>	<p><b>TEAMWORKING quadrant</b></p> <p>Optimum management uncertain because group (team, family, other agencies) unwilling, unable or blocking preferred management</p> <p><b>Ways forwards;</b> Best management of multi-disciplinary team</p> <p><b>SKILLS needed;</b> leadership and teamwork skills, conflict management, negotiation, setting boundaries, working with others, managing psychological issues in the doctor, team and family</p> <p><b>Ways out</b></p> <p>Collusion, passing the buck to other teams, withdrawal of services impasse, blame to patient or to other teams, conflict between different carers/professionals</p> <p><b>SETTING</b> needs to promote skilled team work, (including specific training in teamwork skills) regular meetings, managing psychological boundaries</p>
	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP TEAM FAMILY