We believe this book is unique, in that it presents the evidence that underpins effective clinical communication. It covers the theories that inform the patient-centred approach, the topics that are taught, how they are taught and how they are assessed.

We know many books exist about how to teach clinical communication or what to include in a clinical communication curriculum, but no other book on communication in the healthcare setting takes the approach of tracing the subject to its primary disciplinary origins, looking at how it is practised, taught and learned today, as well as considering future directions.

Inspiration for the book drew on our experience in teaching clinical communication, in conversation with our colleagues, both teachers and clinicians, which in turn identified a concern that the wide and disparate evidence base for the subject had not been effectively acknowledged, collated and presented.

The book aims to enhance understanding of effective clinical communication by discussing the theories, models and evidence in each of three areas:

- the doctor–patient relationship;
- key components of clinical communication; and
- effective teaching and assessment of clinical communication.

We hope that this will prove to be an important text for teachers, researchers, academics, learners, practitioners and policymakers alike.

Reading this book, you will find yourself introduced to, or possibly reminded of, theories and models from a wide range of disciplines that support effective communication. We believe that in the absence of this knowledge, learning clinical communication can often be superficial, as students learn simply to copy certain statements or behaviours, without a deep understanding of which approaches are effective and why.

We hope that by linking the evidence to the various facets of clinical communication you will understand both the principles and practice of effective communication and how these have come about in the modern world. For educators it may enhance practice both in the teaching and assessment of the subject, learners may more fully appreciate what they are being asked to learn, and as a consequence patients, carers and colleagues may benefit from the changes resulting from this deeper understanding.

We hope mostly, however, that this book will stimulate debate, the foundation of healthy academic development of any discipline.

The book is designed so that you can dip in and out as you wish, or you can simply start at the beginning and read through. The chapters begin by providing historical
context before describing current practice, providing you with an appreciation of the depth of the evidence supporting the various components covered. Each chapter concludes with a personal view from the chapter’s author on what the future might hold, given the changing context of the healthcare system, the complexity of the learning environment and the evolving roles of the professional and the patient.

We hope that you enjoy the book, that you learn something that you did not know when you picked it up, and that even if you do not agree with the ideas on what the future might hold for this infinitely complex topic, it challenges you to think about the subject and open it up for discussion.