* **Red Flag:** The patient mentioned that he was not taking a medication as prescribed.
* **Probe**: The provider asked what the problem was.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient revealed that he was afraid of his medication. When he tried it during the day it made him sleepy. He knew he was supposed to take it at night but said he was afraid it would make him unconscious. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of the medication, explaining that while it was sedating, it was not the kind of medication that would make him unconscious or affect his breathing. The provider recommended trying it at bedtime. The patient agreed.
* **Red Flag:** The patient’s A1C was not at goal (and rising from previous visits.)
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient about his diet and what he had been told was a good diet for someone with diabetes. The mentioned he was eating a lot of rice and drinking soda.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient revealed that he did not know that rice and soda raise blood sugar levels (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge).
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of the effect rice and soda on blood sugar levels and arranged for diabetes education.
* **Red Flag:** The patient with an A1C of 8.8 mentioned that he was not taking his insulin with meals as prescribed, because he was unsure about what to take.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient to elaborate.
* **Contextual Factor Discovered by Probing:**  It turned out the patient was unsure of the differences between long-acting and short-acting insulin, and was just taking the former. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider educated the patient on the different types of insulin and how they work. The provider also scheduled the patient to attend a diabetic education session.
* **Red Flag:** A patient said that he had stopped using his CPAP machine.
* **Probe:** The provider asked why.\*
* **Contextual Factor:** He replied that the mask didn’t fit well. (He was unaware that there were different types and sizes of masks for CPAPs. Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider informed him that there were options when it comes to masks for CPAPs and that he could be evaluated to find a better fit. The patient agreed to return to the sleep clinic to explore other options.

\*The question may seem obvious but we’ve heard several audio in which PCPs don’t ask patients why they’ve stopped using their CPAP.

* **Red Flag:** A patient with issues falling and staying asleep declined to go to the sleep clinic for an assessment when it was recommended.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient why he was hesitant to go to the sleep clinic.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he thought that if he went to the sleep clinic he would be subjected to painful tests. He also stated that he thought it would be impossible for him to sleep in the clinic for any assessment. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider corrected the patient’s misunderstanding of what a consultation at the sleep clinic would involve. The provider also informed the patient that some testing was available in his own home instead of the clinic. The patient changed his mind and said he wanted to go now for a sleep consultation.
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s A1C was elevated at 9.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient to walk through each step of how he was taking his medications and what he was eating.
* **Contextual Factor:** When the patient described his daily routine, it became evident that he was not taking his metformin as prescribed and he was drinking a lot of regular soda because he thought diet sodas were worse for his health. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider corrected the patient’s misunderstanding of how to take his metformin and addressed the patient’s understanding of regular soda, informing him that they contain a great deal of sugar. The patient confirmed he understood how to take his metformin and agreed to switch to either water or diet soda.
* **Red Flag:** A patient had not refilled his medications.
* **Probe:** The provider, noticing, asked why.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient explained that he had dyslexia is overwhelmed with the number of pills and pill containers. He explained that since he can’t figure out when to order refills he waits until he is completely out of medications. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider suggested the patient use a pillbox/sorter to organize the medications, and prescribed one. They also suggested the patient call for the medications the last time he can fully fill his pillbox/sorter. The provider also discussed a plan, which the patient agreed to, to get his son and grandson involved with his medications so he has some help.
* **Red Flag:** A patient with asthma stated that he was not taking his daily inhaler because it was “nasty.” He was having symptoms.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient to explain what he meant by “nasty.”
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient hated the after taste and also indicated that he didn’t think he needed it since he also had a rescue inhaler. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider corrected the patient’s misunderstanding of how the daily inhaler worked and how it was different from his rescue inhaler. He also went over how to rinse out his mouth correctly. Once the patient understood, he agreed that it was worth rinsing his mouth after using it to get the long-term benefits.
* **Red Flag:** A patient with a high blood pressure reading (171/94) mentioned that he had stopped taking his blood pressure medications.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient why.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient said that he quite often forgot to take it with meals and thought that was necessary. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider explained that it didn’t have to be with meals. They also discussed and prescribed a pillbox to organize the medications. In addition they suggested the patient position the medication in a place where he was likely to see the pills. The patient seemed engaged in the discussion.
* **Red Flag:** The patient mentioned that he was not taking a medication as prescribed.
* **Probe**: The provider asked what the problem was.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient revealed that he was afraid of his medication. When he tried it during the day it made him sleepy. He knew he was supposed to take it at night but said he was afraid it would make him unconscious. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of the medication, explaining that while it was sedating, it was not the kind of medication that would make him unconscious or affect his breathing. The provider recommended trying it at bedtime. The patient agreed.
* **Red Flag:** The patient’s A1C was not at goal (and rising from previous visits.)
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient about his diet and what he had been told was a good diet for someone with diabetes. The mentioned he was eating a lot of rice and drinking soda.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient revealed that he did not know that rice and soda raise blood sugar levels (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge).
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of the effect rice and soda on blood sugar levels and arranged for diabetes education.
* **Red Flag:** The patient declined to get a recommended lung biopsy.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient to explain his thinking on the procedure.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he believed a large portion of his lung would need to be removed for the biopsy. (Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge Domain)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of the lung biopsy explaining that only a very small portion of his lung would be removed for the biopsy. The provider also encouraged the patient to meet with the surgeon and go over the details of the procedure.
* **Red Flag:** The patient mentioned that he was done using the maintenance inhaler every day as prescribed.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient why he had stopped.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded, “I’m done. I finished it!” (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of the medication, explaining that he needed to continue using it, that when the medication ran out he wasn’t finished with it like an antibiotic.
* **Red Flag:** The patient’s A1C was elevated at 8.5
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient to describe how he was taking his short acting and long acting insulin and what he was eating.
* **Contextual Factor:** During the discussion, the patient revealed that he was fearful of taking is short acting insulin before dinner as he also took the long acting insulin in the evening and was concerned that it might not be safe to take both. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s understanding of his medications, explaining that the two shots he was giving himself at night acted at different times and that he could safely take both of them.
* **Red Flag:** The patient declined the flu shot.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient, “Why not?”
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he believed the shot would make him sick. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider informed the patient that the flu shot contains a dead version of the virus and that the most common side effect of the shot was some soreness at the site, but he could not actually contract the flu from the shot. The provider shared with the patient data that showed having the flu was much more concerning than any side effects from the shot, which are rare. The patient admitted that he thought the shot had a live virus and agreed to have the vaccine. (Success!!)
* **Red Flag:** The provider noticed in the medical record that the patient should have run out of a prescribed medication. (The patient hadn’t refilled the prescription.)
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient what was going on with his medications.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he wasn’t taking the pills that he had been sent because they looked different from the pills he had been taking previously for the same prescription. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider noted the pharmacy had switched brands and looked up the medication on Google images to show the patient how the pills should look. The patient saw he was getting the correct medication.
* **Red Flag**: The patient refused to get a flu vaccination.
* **Probe:** The nurse asked the patient why he didn’t want the vaccine.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient stated that she didn’t need one because she never got sick with the flu. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The nurse educated the patient about the flu virus stating that even if she hadn’t had the flu in the past, she could still be susceptible to the virus, especially since it changed from year to year. (The patient still chose not to receive the vaccine, indicating some other reason is a factor.)
* **Red Flag:** The provider noticed in the medical record that the patient should have run out of a prescribed medication.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient, “Are you taking these the way you should be?”
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he had stopped taking the medication when he saw he was running low. He said, “I’m fuzzy on what they do.” (Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge Domain)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider made sure all the meds were up-to-date in the system and explained the purpose for each medication on the patient’s list and why they were important to take as prescribed. The patient seemed surprised and grateful to understand what the medications were for and how they worked.
* **Red Flag**: A patient under treatment for hypertension had a high blood pressure reading while getting his vitals checked.
* **Probe:** The nurse asked the patient if he was following his recommended plan for his hypertension.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient stated he thought the new blood pressure guidelines now meant his blood pressure was in the “normal range” (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge).
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The nurse addressed the patient’s knowledge of ideal blood pressure readings informing him that his readings were in fact outside of the recommended guidelines.
* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned that he was not taking all of his medications as prescribed.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient to explain how he was currently taking his medications.
* **Contextual Factor Discovered by Probing:**  The patient explained that not only did he keep forgetting to go to his pill box, but he didn’t know how to better remember. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider not only developed a plan with the patient to set reminders on his phone, but also set the alarms for the patient (with his consent).
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s A1C was 12.7 despite starting insulin.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient and his caregiver to explain how the patient has been taking his insulin and managing his diet.
* **Contextual Factor Discovered by Probing:**  They said he that he was taking his insulin every other day. It also came out that he had been eating a lot of candy because he had memory issues and easy access to sweets in the home. (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care Made:** The provider informed the patient and caretaker to take his insulin daily, discussed that the caretaker should remove the junk food, and arrange for diabetes/nutrition education. The patient and caregiver conveyed that they understood and agreed with the care plan, and repeated it back.
* **Red Flag**: A patient’s blood pressure reading was 188/104
* **Probe:** The pharmacist asked the patient if he had taken his blood pressure medications as prescribed.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient explained that he had recently spent a lot of money on medications he got in the Philippines and wanted to use them up first. (Doman: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge).
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The pharmacist informed the patient that the medications he purchased in the Philippines might not be as effective, that they aren’t regulated in the same way, and that it was safer to use medications from the VA and that he should switch now. The patient agreed with the plan.
* **Red Flag:** The patient had missed two appointments in the past four months.
* **Probe**: The provider noticed and asked what happened.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he is generally disorganized and has trouble keeping track of upcoming appointments (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge).
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider addressed the patient’s situation by printing up a new list of upcoming appointments (replacing the patient’s disorganized personal handwritten notes) and going over his schedule in detail.
* **Red Flag:** The patient was taking a medication (Gabapentin) as needed instead of daily as prescribed.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient to explain why.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he thought the medication was okay to “stop and start” and took it only when he felt he needed it. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider explained to the patient that he was on a high dose and that stopping suddenly could cause anxiety, confusion and even seizures. The patient responded that he would now take it only as directed. The patient and the provider also agreed that in the future if the patient wants to change how he takes a medication, he will discuss first.
* **Red Flag:** The patient mentioned that he had had several episodes of low blood sugar (home glucose readings below 60).
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient to describe his routine at home.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he sometimes skips breakfast or eats small amounts of food in the morning but still takes the same dose of his (short acting) insulin because he thought that was what he is supposed to do. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider explained to the patient that if he skips meals or eats too lightly the medication will drop his blood sugar levels too low. The patient said he should be eating a full breakfast every morning anyways and would now do so.
* **Red Flag:** The patient asked the provider if he could stop his Lisinopril.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient why he wanted to stop a medication he had been on for years that had been effective.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient said that he had recently read some stories online about possible side effects (cough, headache, problems related to kidney). (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider confirmed the patient wasn’t having any of the symptoms and emphasized the benefits. The patient agreed that since he hadn’t had any of the side effects that it made sense to continue the medication.
* **Red Flag:** The patient did not come in for a nurse visit to check his blood pressure as had been ordered at the last visit.
* **Probe**: The doctor asked the patient what happened.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient said that he forgot that he was supposed to come in to see the nurse, but wished he had. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The doctor wrote down the instructions and recommended that the patient post them on his refrigerator where he could see them. The patient agreed with the plan.
* **Red Flag:** The patient was complaining of pain, yet a review of the medications in CPRS indicated that he hadn’t refilled his pain medication (meloxicam) and wasn’t taking anything else for pain.
* **Probe**: The provider asked the patient why he hadn’t refilled his pain meloxicam if he was still experiencing pain.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient revealed that he didn’t know what it was for (Domain: Skills, Abilities and Knowledge).
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider not only explained what the medication was for, but also made sure that the prescription printed on the bottle and printed out for the patient stated “for pain.”
* **Red Flag:** A patient with diabetes mentioned he had been adjusting his insulin doses on his own, while not monitoring his blood sugar.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient to describe how he was deciding what dose to administer.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient responded that he was basing his dosage “not on anything scientific,” but on how he felt, which he thought made the most sense. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider explained to the patient how a sliding scale for insulin dosing works, that it relies on monitoring, and that it is crucial to follow those instructions to avoid episodes of low blood sugar. The provider scheduled a follow-up visit with a diabetic educator. (When we reviewed the patient’s chart four months later, he was taking his insulin as prescribed.)
* **Red Flag:** An elderly patient, recovering from a recent abdominal surgery with no complaints, told his doctor he wanted an endoscopy.
* **Probe:** The provider asked him to explain why.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient said he wanted another “scope” to be sure everything looks correct inside following the surgery. (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider explained to the patient that a scope is not necessary and could potentially cause more harm than benefit. The provider also explained that the patient’s improving health and normal digestive function was a good indication of the success of the surgery. The patient replied that it was good to know it was not necessary and he hadn’t realized there were risks. He agreed it was best not to have it done.
* **Red Flag:** A patient did not get an ultrasound of his liver that had been ordered for him.
* **Probe:** The provider asked the patient why.
* **Contextual Factor:** The patient replied that he thought the order was a mistake because he knows women get ultrasounds and “I’m not a woman!” (Domain: Skills, Abilities, and Knowledge)
* **Contextual Plan of Care:** The provider explained to the patient that ultrasounds weren’t just for women and pregnancies and explained why one was recommended for the patient’s condition.