Explanatory Models of Illness

The following questions can be used to explore a patient’s explanatory model – their ideas about the nature of their problem, its cause, severity, prognosis and treatment preferences.¹

1. What do you call the problem?
2. What do you think has caused the problem?
3. Why do you think it started when it did?
4. What do you think the sickness does? How does it work?
5. How severe is the sickness? Will it have a short or long course?
6. What kind of treatment do you think you should receive?
7. What are the chief problems the sickness has caused?
8. What do you fear most about the sickness?