

Meaningful Dialogue: Enhancing Patient-Physician Communications

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Meaningful Dialogue: Learning Objectives

- Recognize that improved physician-patient communications can lead to better outcomes and better care, as well as lower costs
- Learn the importance of active listening in physician-patient encounters
- Be aware of how electronic communications, email, use of patient portals, etc. can impact the overall patient experience and physician-patient relationship

**The problem with
communication is the
illusion that it has
occurred.**

- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Communication Breakdown

- **Communication failure (as opposed to provider's lack of skill) is a root cause of 70 percent of adverse outcomes in hospitals.**
- **In over 60 percent of cases, patients misunderstand directions after a visit to their doctor.**
- **On average, physicians wait just 18 seconds before interrupting patients' narratives of their symptoms.**

Source: Joshi, "Doctor, Shut Up and Listen," *The New York Times*, January 4, 2015

Have you heard?

- **Doctors are rude.**
- **Doctors don't listen.**
- **Doctors never have any time.**
- **Doctors don't explain things in terms patients can understand.**

Communication Barriers

What are some of the barriers to effective communication in your practice?

What gets in the way?

Beyond Frustration

Poor communication results in:

- Reduced quality of care**
- Higher costs**
- Increased risk**
- Preventable readmissions**
- Poor patient satisfaction scores**

History is not on your side ...

- **Communication long thought of as a “soft science”**
- **Physician training has placed more emphasis on clinical skills and prescribing treatment**
- **Interpersonal and communication skills were not recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties as a physician key competency until 1999.**

The Good

Evidence demonstrates that good communication helps patients stick to recommended treatments and manage chronic diseases.

It improves outcomes in the management of diabetes, hypertension and cancer, and among other diseases.

The Bad

There is a 19% higher risk of non-adherence among patients whose doctors communicate poorly than among those whose doctors communicate well.

The Ugly

A breakdown in physician-patient communications is cited in 40% or more malpractice suits.

**The biggest communication
problem is we do not listen
to understand.**

We listen to reply.

How's your hearing?

How well do you LISTEN?

Hear what people are really saying

- **We listen to obtain information**
- **We listen to understand**
- **We listen for enjoyment**
- **We listen to learn**

Becoming an Active Listener

There are five key elements of active listening.

They all help ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also “speaks” loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly
- Put aside distracting thoughts
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors
- “Listen” to the speaker's body language

Show That You're Listening

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

- Nod occasionally
- Smile and use other facial expressions
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like “yes” and “uh huh”

Provide Feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said.

- **Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing**
- **Ask questions to clarify certain points**
- **Summarize the speaker's comments periodically**

Defer Judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time (within reason). It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions
- Don't (immediately) present counter arguments

Respond Appropriately

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response
- Assert your opinions respectfully
- Treat the other person in a way you think he or she would want to be treated

Active Listening

Requires concentration and determination.

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying.

Concentrate on the message.

Ask questions, reflect and paraphrase.

Electronic Communications

- **Email**
- **EHR functions**
- **Patient portals**
- **Social media**

A First (or Second) Opinion: Dr. Google

Patients may:

- **Receive misinformation**
- **Misunderstand what they read**
- **Encounter a biased medical suggestion**
- **Enter their appointment with preconceptions about their diagnosis or treatment**

Online Information Seekers

- **46%** said what they found online led them to consult with a medical professional
- **38%** decided to manage their suspected health condition at home
- **72%** say they have looked online for health information in the last **12** months
- **35%** have gone online specifically to try to figure out a medical condition for themselves or someone they know

Turn The Table

- Provide good information sources to patients
- Actively listen to their online research – it will most likely help them articulate their problem more clearly
- Building block in the physician-patient relationship
- Increase patient engagement and shared decision making
- Agree to disagree

Patient Portals

Early on, both physicians and patients slow to adopt.

Lack of “marketing” to patients.

Difficult and confusing to use.

EHR add-on functionality is increasing utilization.

Meaningful Use requirements

Advantages of Portal Usage

- **View test results or visit summaries**
- **Refill medications**
- **Make appointments**
- **Access educational materials**
- **Secure messaging to providers**

The Next Direction

Where are patient portals headed?

- **Intake and online forms**
- **Mobile health and home monitoring data**
- **More longitudinal patient records – in real time – with access by both provider and patient**

Sources: *Health Affairs*; Kaiser Permanente

Positive Effects of Widespread Adoption

- **Greater patient compliance**
- **Greater patient connection to a health care system**
- **Greater responsibility for patients taking care of themselves – remaining healthy or improving their health status**

Source: The Camden Group

**Good communication skills
require a high-level of self-
awareness. Understanding
your own personal style
leads to greater success.**

Questions?

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