

Health Literacy: Teaching Clear Communication in Geriatrics & Gerontology
January 8-9, 2009

Health Care Provider / Patient / Observer
Triad # 1

Scenario:

This is a health communication scenario about Mrs. Lindquist who has several chronic health problems. It is an opportunity for you to try out some of the communication strategies learned at this conference as well as an opportunity to practice how to assess the quality of health communications.

In each group, one person will assume the role of the health care provider. That role could be a physician, nurse, pharmacist, social worker, or dentist. Another participant will be the patient, and the third person in the triad will be the observer. This activity will last about 20 minutes.

Case:

Mrs. Lindquist is a 78 year old widow who lives with her daughter on a very fixed income. She has depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, short term memory problems, wears glasses, and is moderately hard of hearing. She had a small stroke last year that resulted in some right-sided weakness and now walks with a cane. When Mrs. L comes into the clinic today, her blood pressure is very high 190/90 (normal 120/80) and blood sugar is also very high at 385 (normal < 126). She is carrying the lab slip her provider gave her at the last appointment and says "I thought I would just get blood work today." Her provider had increased the Benazapril (for blood pressure) from 10mg daily to 20mg daily and increased the Glipizide (for diabetes) from 5mg twice a day to 10mg twice a day. She is here for a follow-up appointment and was supposed to bring her medications. She has forgotten to do this.

Medications:

- Amlodipine 10mg daily (for blood pressure)
- Benazapril 20mg daily (for blood pressure)
- Glipizide 10mg twice a day (for diabetes)
- Aspirin 325mg daily (for stroke and heart)
- Simvastatin 20mg daily (for high cholesterol)
- Celexa 20mg daily (for depression)

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Patient Role
<p>Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow the provider to explain your diabetes and medicine without jumping in much. ▪ Indicate subtly that you don't understand some things. ▪ Ask at least 2 of the questions provided. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do I need to cut back on how much sugar I eat? ○ Will I die from diabetes? ○ Is there anything I can do to get rid of the diabetes? ▪ Make at least 1 incorrect statement about diabetes or the provider's plan.
<p>Your background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your name is Mrs. Lindquist, 78 years old and you live with your daughter on a very fixed income. ▪ You completed high school and worked as a beautician, but you never learned to read well. Your husband used to take care of your finances and the household. ▪ You have depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, and you had a small stroke last year leaving you with some weakness on your right side and now you walk with a cane. ▪ You are hard of hearing, wear glasses, and have some short term memory loss. ▪ You have low health literacy, meaning you don't understand most written information and really don't know what diabetes is or why it needs to be treated. ▪ You've never told your health care provider about your problems with literacy as you are much too embarrassed. ▪ Last month, you waited in line for an hour for your medications and then gave up. Your daughter went to the pharmacy a week ago and brought home pills that were a different color. You were worried that she had picked up the wrong pills and you didn't take them. ▪ You had blood work a few months ago and don't understand why you need it again. ▪ Your daughter took you to the lab last time; when you tried to go alone, you couldn't figure out the signs and you got lost and are afraid you might get lost again.
<p>Some things you could say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the provider's explanations are confusing, quick or involves medical jargon, convey that you don't understand, but be subtle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nonverbal – raise your eyebrows or look down ○ Verbal – “I guess so” or “Whatever you say, Doc” ○ Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I forgot my glasses, so I can't really see the pill bottles. Maybe we should go over this later.” ▪ “My daughter will ask a million questions. Can you write all this down?”
<p>Give positive feedback when appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Nobody ever broke it down to me like that. I get it.” ▪ “Thanks for explaining it like that. I usually have no clue what you all are saying.”
<p>For teach back:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make sure you get some of this wrong so the provider has a chance to correct you. ▪ If the explanations are too complex, say: “Wait...say that again.”

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Health Care Provider Role

Things to consider:

- You wonder if she is taking the prescribed medication and don't understand why she didn't get blood tests before the appointment.
- You wonder how much she understands about her diagnosis and treatment. You know she has received written diabetes education materials, which gave a definition of diabetes and explained the importance of monitoring blood work on a regular basis.

Your task is to tell the patient about diabetes, clarify the medication regimen, and set up a plan for following up with going to the lab and following up with the diabetes RN.

Feel free to customize the information to be consistent with your discipline. For example, if you are role-playing as a Social Worker, you may want to ask Mrs. L what *other* care providers have told her about her diagnosis and treatment (physician, pharmacist, nurse).

Assessment Goals: Explore the meaning of diabetes to you patient – patient centered

- “What do you call your problem?”
- “What do you think causes your problem?”
- “How do you cope with your problem?”
- “What concerns do you have about your problem?”
- “What medications do you have?”
- “How do you learn best?”

Teaching Goals:

- Practice using plain language
- Practice using teach back to close the loop:
 - What is diabetes and why is it important to treat
 - Go over medications and recent changes
 - What are the next steps (going to the lab, follow up with the RN, etc.)

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Observer Role
Your overall task is to pay close attention to whether or not the healthcare provider utilizes the clear health communication techniques discussed. Complete the table below on how well the healthcare provider demonstrated clear health communication skills with the patient.
1. Listen for medical terms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diabetes instead of blood sugar ▪ Hypertension instead of blood pressure 2. Watch for complex nonmedical words or unusual medicalized usage of words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Your glucose is elevated” instead of “ Your blood sugar is high” 3. Watch how the healthcare provider treats numbers in explaining results or medications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do they put the numbers in easily understood context? 4. Does the health care provider use any visual aids to help the patient understand?

Overall, how would you rate the provider’s clear health communication skills in the following areas?					
Clear Communication	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Using simple, clear non-medical language					
Limiting information to key points only					
Repeating key information more than 1 time					
Asking the patient to re-cap what was said using “Teach Back”					
Focusing on the patient’s concerns					
Compensating for patient disability (hearing, vision, physical disability)					

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Teacher / Student or Trainee / Observer
Triad # 2

We will continue with Mrs. Lindquist's case. At her last appointment with her provider, she was given a lab slip and told to complete her blood tests that day. However when she came to her follow-up appointment with the trainee, she was carrying the lab slip and said "I thought I would just get blood work today." The trainee who had been working with Mrs. L for more than two months was very upset because he/she believed that Mrs. L should have understood that the blood tests should have been done earlier.

In this scenario, the trainee presents this case to the teacher. The trainee is clearly very frustrated with Mrs. L's apparent non-adherence to the recommendations and instructions given on the previous visit.

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Student / Trainee Role
<p>Your background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You are a very well-meaning student in a clinic setting ▪ You are frustrated by your patient and her non-adherence and are worried about the potential health implications. ▪ You are starting to think that Mrs. L is doing this on purpose. ▪ You are looking to your teacher for advice on how to handle Mrs. L.
<p>Points to Consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You are unfamiliar with the concept of health literacy. 2. You may be skeptical of the impact of health literacy in this case.
<p>Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow your teacher to explain the impact of limited health literacy on your patient. ▪ Ask at least two questions about what you should do to improve the care for your patient. ▪ Ask clarifying questions if what your teacher explains is unclear.

Teacher Role
<p>Your Goal: Based on your student's frustration, you suspect that limited health literacy may be playing a role in this situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help your student be more aware of the impact of limited health literacy and provide practical tips for how to work with this specific patient.
<p>Assessment Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess your student's knowledge of health literacy. ▪ Assess what patient issues may be affecting their ability to adhere to instructions. Consider health literacy, sensory, functional, and cognitive impairments.
<p>Teaching Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Model how the student could introduce "Teach Back" technique. ▪ Demonstrate the use of "Ask Me 3".

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Observer Role
<p>Your overall task is to pay close attention to whether or not the teacher</p> <p>a) raised the student's awareness of the impact of limited health literacy on healthcare and,</p> <p>b) provided recommendations or tools for working with this particular patient.</p> <p>Complete the table below on how well the teacher effectively demonstrated clear health communication skills to the student.</p>

Overall, how would you rate the teacher's effectiveness in the following areas?					
Teaching Effectiveness	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Asking specific questions about non-medical issues that may affect the patient's adherence to treatment.					
Asking questions to assess the learner's knowledge of health literacy.					
Modeling specific examples of how to initiate "teach back" or "Ask Me 3".					
Other comments					