

How to Build a Channel of Effective Doctor Patient Communication

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Effective communication is one of the most important facets of a doctor patient relationship. This fragile and delicate relationship needs to be nurtured carefully. And the best way to do this is by building a channel of clear and effective communication. Patients come to you because they trust in your skills and expertise as a doctor. They also expect their doctor to adopt a clear and compassionate approach to communicating with them.

However, in today's time driven environment, developing a channel of effective communication is big challenge.

Doctors are hard pressed for time as there is an increased emphasis on clinical productivity. The window of opportunity thus for building the doctor patient relationship is becoming smaller. In such a situation, is it possible for doctors to focus on improving patient relationship and experiences? The answer is yes.

Here are a few things to keep in mind.

The Listening Doctor

Effective communication between a doctor and a patient can only happen when the trust factor is established and reinforced at every stage of patient interaction. Start by listening to your patients more. Listening implies a personal interest and this is what patients want from their doctors.

When your patients talk – try not to interrupt or dominate the conversation. Help the conversation along by asking open-ended questions. This not only encourages patients to clearly describe their condition but it also allows them to openly discuss their fears and concerns about an illness.

The greatest advantage of improving listening skills – is that it allows doctors to take better treatment decisions while also building care plans that are more in accordance to patient expectations. When this happens, patients are not only encouraged to actively be a part of their treatment options but they find it easier to follow the care plan.

Another benefit of listening – is that doctors can easily tune into any patient questions or fears or any kind of confusion or misunderstandings that a patient might have. Incomplete information is just as dangerous as incorrect

information. To counter this situation, ask your patients to summarize their understanding of the treatment and care plan.

Compassion, Empathy, Sensitivity – Don't forget the Human Angle

As a doctor you meet a wide section of patients from different cultural backgrounds and gender preferences, as well as different race and religions. Effective communication in these cases becomes as much a matter of clearly communicating information as it is about being sensitive to these differences.

What goes unspoken can often introduce a certain bias in the doctor patient relationship. The biggest danger here is that it can limit patient choices which in turn can put a patient's health at risk. Awareness and sensitivity is the only way to avoid being presumptuous; what you say and what you don't say, the kind of counsel you provide, as well as the kind of follow-up care you suggest can heavily impact your patient interaction.

Doctor patient interaction lasts beyond just a moment –

- It is based on a culture of establishing a connection.
- Ensuring that patients are aware of and understand their options.
- Responding to patient needs and expectations.
- Helping patients achieve their desired outcomes.

The best way to meet the above four goals is by increasing the duration of patient visits whenever possible. This makes it easy for doctors to address not only the core issues and concerns of a patient, but it allows doctors an opportunity to address multiple patient concerns. Again, it allows for a more personalized doctor patient interaction as the scope for better understanding a patient's condition and his subsequent worries gets expanded.

9 Steps to Improving Patient Interactions

- Instruct and train your staff to be alert and responsive to patient questions, needs and expectations.
- Limit the use of medical jargon. Quality healthcare after-all is less about showing what you know, and more about imparting information in a way that is easy to understand and of maximum use to your patients. Real-world analogies and simple language always work best.
- Don't rush through information that is important. If you are hard pressed for time, you can always ask your patients to communicate via email or even suggest the patient asks his questions in the next visit. Make sure you repeat important elements of your discussion and don't forget to ask if your patient understands the information.
- Keep an open mind to patient fears and concerns. The best way to put your patients at ease is by displaying kindness and empathizing with them.
- If a patient comes in with a companion, patiently respond to questions from the companion.

- If you need to discuss complications or any kind of negative information, encourage the patient to ask questions or to air their doubts. Try to be candid and provide as much information and assurance.
- If a patient has been referred from another physician first help the patient better understand the facts and details of his condition before suggesting treatment options and care plan.
- Encourage patients to write down their questions prior to an appointment. You can make these question forms available at the office or even provide them online. This can help save time and provide a more meaningful direction to your conversations.
- One of the best ways of dealing with time restrictions is by hiring non-physician health care providers. An advanced practice nurse or physician assistant who has good patient-centric interviewing skills can help with established patients.

Effective Communication

A VITAL LINK TO IMPROVING DOCTOR PATIENT RELATIONSHIPS



The relationship between a doctor and a patient is pivotal to providing stellar healthcare services. This is a bond of trust and honesty. And the only way to strengthen doctor patient relationships is via clear effective communication.

5 Important Aspects of Doctor Patient Communication



COMMUNICATION IS MORE THAN WRITING AND SPEECH

Writing and how you talk are elemental to effective communication. However, Effective communication is subject to:



KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

A patient can come to you for a variety of reasons such as seeking advice on a current health condition/concern, or to seek information on advanced treatment options, or simply to gain better understanding of possible future health risks.

In each of these instances doctors can build effective communication channels that can lead to improved doctor patient relationships.

Understand what a patient needs or wants from you.

Once you understand these aspects of your audience, you will be able to suitably structure your message/responses.



LISTEN WITH INTENT

The best way to understand your patients is by listening to them. And in certain cases you need to even listen to things that a patient is not telling you!

By actively listening you can pick up on what a patient is saying and correctly interpret what he or she means or is trying to say to you.

Listening with intent also displays your sincerity and care towards better understanding your patients and this puts them at ease.

This in turn can make your job easier as it allows you to probe with the right questions.



BE CAREFUL OF YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS

The kind of words you use can either push opinions to be positive or negative.



CULTURAL AND PERSONAL SENSITIVITY

Patients come to you from all walks of life. To be able to deal with a varied patient base requires doctors to be aware of cultural and communal differences as well as be informed

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