



SQHN Publication

Communication in Health Care Delivery



The care of patients involves many different individuals, all needing to share patients' information and discuss their management. As a consequence there is increasing interest in the use of information and communication technologies to support health services. Indeed, if information is the lifeblood of healthcare then communication systems are the heart that pumps it. ¹

Communication is a vital component of healthcare, so much that the delivery of quality healthcare is highly dependent on effective communication between patients and care providers. Studies indicate that the clinician's ability to explain, listen and empathize can have a profound effect on biological and functional health outcomes as well as patient satisfaction and overall care experience. Furthermore, communication among healthcare team members influences the quality of working relationships which affects job satisfaction and has a profound impact on patient safety. ²

Most complaints about healthcare providers are related to issues of communication, not clinical competency. Poor communication in a healthcare facility results in poor decisions that adversely affect patient outcomes, while it has been proven that collaboration and communication are the most important features to promote and maintain in the hospital setting to improve patient and staff satisfaction in the unit as a large. ³

Communication constraints in health care organizations

Despite the increasing interest in communication, extensive gaps continue to exist in our broad understanding of the role of communication in health care delivery. Involvement of multiple departments and healthcare providers in patient care are risks during the delivery of care, due to communication gaps or improper hand over from one healthcare giver to another. ²

Miscommunication between patient and provider, distractions, inadequate records, language barriers, and lack of collaboration between healthcare givers are further examples. When healthcare professionals do not communicate, it can lead to a negative workplace culture and poor quality of patient care.



Improving Communication in Healthcare

There are several communication models that improve patient care and reduce the likelihood of medical errors. They include the RESPECT model, partnership method, SBAR method and so on.

- ❖ The **RESPECT Model** is an acronym for **R**apport, **E**mpathy, **S**upport, **P**artnership, **E**xplanation, **C**ultural competence and **T**rust.⁴ This includes the style and components of the

communication that should occur between patient and provider. The care provider must have good rapport with the patient and other caregivers, be supportive and empathetic. The clinician should be able to discuss difficult topics without displaying discomfort.

The ability to accept the patient's attitude without showing irritation or intolerance and react positively to indirect messages expressed by a patient is paramount and trust is established between the two parties. These skills allow the physician to understand the patient's point of view and utilize it in treatment.

- ❖ **Partnership method** refers to physician-patient communication where amount of speaking and listening time is equal such that the physician speaks, listens for questions and uses the teach-back method which requires the patients to explain to a member of the care team the information they have just been provided, This method has achieved improved comprehension and information retention by patients.

- ❖ The **SBAR (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation) technique** provides a framework for communication between members of the health care team regarding a patient's condition.

- **S = Situation** (a concise statement of the problem)
- **B = Background** (pertinent and brief information related to the situation)
- **A = Assessment** (analysis and considerations of options)
- **R = Recommendation** (action requested/recommended)

SBAR is a simple technique useful for framing any conversation, especially critical ones requiring a clinician's immediate attention and action. It paves a focused way to set expectations for 'what' will be communicated and 'how' between members of the team, which is essential for developing teamwork. It enables timely and well communicated decisions regarding the patient, hence, fostering a culture of patient safety.

These methods are made easier by implementing the following steps in any health care organization



1. Incorporate effective communication in the organization's mandatory training program.
2. Make communication part of the organization's culture
3. Implement patient satisfaction surveys.
4. Schedule regular meetings for employees to discuss survey feedback.
5. Increase the transparency of data sharing between different medical departments.

Effective communication starts from the bottom up and must be reinforced at all levels from entry-level, support staff to executive management, so that organizations will be better equipped to provide quality patient care.⁵

Conclusion

Effective communication is essential for delivering quality patient care and building good physician-patient relationships based on compassion and shared respect. Clear, accurate, and timely communication is absolutely essential to maximizing performance, improving patient outcomes, and decreasing risk exposure. Patients' perceptions of the quality of the healthcare they receive are highly dependent on the quality of their interactions with the healthcare team.

References

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