

**Clear and ethical communications & Informed consent**

Clear communication and understanding is the best predictor of a good outcome. When doctors understand what patients are saying to them, they can diagnose and prescribe treatment. And when patients understand what the doctor says, they are more likely to continue with treatment and follow advice. Almost 80 percent of the information for an accurate diagnosis comes from what the patient says to her doctor!

Communicating clearly and fairly to the patient respects the patient's autonomy and ties into beneficence. Listen carefully, think before you speak, and pay attention to nonverbal cues for better outcomes. Poor communication is not only a predictor of poor outcome; it can be costly to the provider. Many doctors who face malpractice cases didn't communicate clearly and dismissed the patient's concerns and opinions.

**Communicating with the patient**

Time is a valuable and scarce commodity in the doctor-patient relationship. An average visit in a managed-care setting lasts only 15 minutes. In the short time you have together, you must make sure you understand the patient's symptoms and concerns so you can make a correct diagnosis, and you also must make sure that the patient understands her diagnosis and the treatment.

Healthcare providers need to ask the right questions and then let the patient speak without interrupting. Doctors can learn communication skills and take the time to implement them. In an office visit, you should

- 1- Keep track of body language and nonverbal communication.
- 2- Use open-ended questions rather than questions requiring yes or no answers.
- 3- Develop trust and pay attention to emotional issues.
- 4- Be as specific as possible with a diagnosis and treatment and make sure patients understand them.
- 5- Let the patient know the protocol for delivering test results.
- 6- Offer choices and treatment alternatives.
- 7- Prioritize directions and the order of treatment.
- 8- Treat patients as respected partners in their care.

### **Making sure the patient understands**

The patient must understand the diagnosis and treatment. But because healthcare providers are trained in medical terminology and patients are often a bit anxious, it can be difficult to communicate in language a patient understands. Translating from medical jargon to lay terms takes skill and practice. You must never just assume that the patient understands a diagnosis or treatment.

### **Informed consent**

These are the standards for informed consent:

- 1- The doctor has to tell the patient about medically viable options. This means treatment, which is the medically accepted standard of care, must be offered to the patient, as well as other options with the potential to help the patient more than harm him.
- 2- A patient can be told of nonmainstream medical approaches when a respectable minority of physicians endorse it.
- 3- If a doctor knows of more experienced doctors who can perform the treatment the patient requests, the doctor should tell the patient about those other experts.

### **Granting and denying access to medical records**

According to the law, these persons and groups can have limited or full access to a patient's medical records:

- 1- Family, depending on state law and the competency of the patient
- 2- Guardians for minors and dependents
- 3- Insurance companies
- 4- Government agencies such as Medicare Workers Compensation, and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- 5- Employers when they self-insure
- 6- Health researchers and the Center for Disease Control (CDC)
- 7- Officers of the court when medical records are relevant to a legal case