Health Literacy: Empowering Patient Decision-Making through Enhanced Communication

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Take Aways

“What we say does not matter unless our patients are able to understand... Otherwise, we didn’t reach them, and that is the same as if we didn’t treat them.” - Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA, U.S. Surgeon General, 2009-2013

• Things you can do
  ▪ Help your patients find information and services
  ▪ “Speak their language”
  ▪ Help them process information
  ▪ Work toward understanding each other
Health Education

Any combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and communities improve their health, by increasing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes.

Health Literacy

“The degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions.”

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, Title V
Health literacy skills help patients...

- Find information and services
- Talk about their needs and preferences for (and barriers to) health
- Understand what the doctor is saying about:
  - Treatment options
  - Risks
  - Possible and probable outcomes
- Use information to make better health decisions
Health Literacy skills help healthcare professionals...

- Better understand what patients are saying
- Provide patients with information they can understand and use:
  - Treatment options
  - Risks
  - Possible and probable outcomes
- Empower patients to make better health decisions
Adult Literacy Rates in Africa

Find Information and Services
Taking Care of Someone with Suspected Ebola: Be Safe While You Wait

1. Stay at least 3 feet (1 meter) away from the patient.

   If a loved one is sick with suspected Ebola, call 117 for help. Do not touch them, their blood, or their body fluids (vomit, feces, urine, sweat). Tell them to drink plenty of Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) or water. Patients who drink lots of ORS early have a much better chance of surviving.

2. Only one person should care for the patient while you wait for help to arrive. Do not let other family members come close or provide care. Stay at least 3 feet (1 meter) away from the patient. Do not touch the cup the patient drinks from. Refill the bottle without touching it. Do not touch the bedclothes, sheets, or other items the patient has touched while sick.

3. When caring for a sick loved one, do not touch them, and wash your hands often with soap and water or chlorine solution, even if you haven't touched them. Wear a protective barrier such as gloves and cover all uncovered skin. Wash your hands every time you provide care.

   U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

4. Patients with suspected Ebola should be cared for in a treatment facility.

   If you have a sick loved one, they have the best chance of surviving with medical care at a treatment facility. This helps to protect your family too.
Speak Their Language

2caps q4h po...WHAT?

Take 2 pills every 4 hours
Cultural Relevance

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Feeling very tired (fatigue)
- Vomiting and diarrhea develop after 3–6 days
- Weakness (can be severe)
- Stomach pain
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

www.cdc.gov
Tradition and Beliefs
Help Patients Process Information
Work Toward Understanding Each Other

- Use plain language
- Listen
  - To what they say
  AND
  - What they don’t say
- Use “teach back” and “show back”

http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/improving_health_literacy.pdf
Empower Decision-Making

Find → Communicate → Process → Understand → Decide
"As clinicians, what we say does not matter unless our patients are able to understand the information we give them well enough to use it to make good healthcare decisions. Otherwise, we didn’t reach them, and that is the same as if we didn’t treat them."

Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA
U.S. Surgeon General, 2009-2013