



Rural Health Care

Marketing & Education Consultancy

www.Trizzie.com

Communication and your Patients

Most people like to think of ourselves as good to excellent communicators. We have been trained from birth so therefore we should be right? No, if we were to survey patients about health care communication skills in general, we would find, **to our dismay, from a patients point of view that we are lacking in our ability to communicate with our patients effectively.** There have been studies that monitored provider-patient interactions and found that most healthcare providers will interrupt a patient shortly after the patient starts talking. It was found more so that physicians received the lowest scores from patients regarding communications skills.

Note; we are not picking on physicians only. **Across the board in health care a large majority lack the time to communicate effectively.** It is becoming such a large part of the success of health care businesses that you can expect in the near future that healthcare providers are going to be compensated according to their communications skills. Or if you are an independent health care provider you may want to take an outside view of how effective your communication skills are. More and more facilities are changing the way they pay based on performance. Some (P4P) programs will base their compensation at least in part on patient satisfaction, which is highly dependent upon provider communication skills.

This article will provide suggestions that will enhance your communications and your patient's experience.

1. **First interaction with patient.**

Many of us would start the patient interview with "What brings you to the office today?" or "Why did Doctor Y refer you to our office?" This is what we tend to see as efficiency and professionalism, the patient may perceive as "obviously they are in a hurry" and/or "They are not interested in me as a person, they only see me as time and dollars."

First to avoid this inaccurate patient perception, we suggest at least two minutes for the new patient interview and/ or catching up on what is going on in your patients life. Devote the two minutes to non-medical questions. This may lead to additional talking points that make the patient feel you are interested in them as a person and not as an organ system. Also you will find that some conditions may be caused to other outside factors such as home or work life.

2. **Ending patient appointments.**

Many of us end the interaction by giving the patient a prescription and/or advice before sending them off to a nurse or receptionist so that they can make their next appointment. It is important to make sure that all questions and concerns have been answered before you leave your patient. Get into a habit of asking every patient "Have I answered all of your questions?" or "Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to discuss on your visit today?" Ending each encounter with these kinds of questions assures you that patients are satisfied.

3. **Provide useful educational materials to patients.**

There's no better way to increase your communication with patients than to make sure that they have access to credible, current educational material on their condition. In addition to your office pamphlets, you can tie in helpful educational information on your website and refer patients to that information when they call with questions or issues if you are unavailable. The saying "key to success is information" Information is empowering, particularly on subjects that directly affect or concern us.

Bottom Line: In this era of information overload, effective communication is becoming increasingly vital to the success of our health care business. Sometimes just talking to the patient for a few minutes before discussing their medical condition, asking a few extra questions, and providing helpful information and/or educational materials will make all the difference in how patients see their relationship with you and how they talk about you to their friends, loved ones and throughout the community.

Do it right the first time. When it's done right and well, the personal and professional gains are satisfying and the value of a recognized authority will gain the respect of the community, patients and staff and is an effective marketing plan that is rewarding.

Trizzie understands that successful characteristics are developed over time and are an important part of any business. Let Trizzie assist you in evaluating and implementing the right strategies for your current and future success. www.trizzie.com