

**EIGHT WAYS TO
IMPROVE PATIENT
COMMUNICATIONS**

USE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS



Much of your professional training has emphasized what you say to patients. Use open-ended questions that can't be answered with just a "yes" or a "no." These invite the patient to reflect on their problem, their pain, and symptoms.

READ NON-VERBAL CLUES

Don't ask the patient if they understand, as they may answer with a "yes," even though they do not understand. Does your patient nod quietly while giving you a blank look? That may be the first hint that the patient does not understand the explanation or instructions given to them by the physician or staff. Attentiveness while taking patient history correlates with high level of patient satisfaction.



ASSESS PATIENTS' LITERACY



Communication is important when talking to patients about the procedure or the results. Many patients have trouble understanding the health information and medical terminology that clinicians regularly use. Patient understanding includes assessing the patient's language and educational limitations. If there is a language barrier, you may need to speak slowly and in plain, nonmedical language.

USE THE TEACH-BACK METHOD

The teach-back method is a way for healthcare providers to explain information clearly. Ask the patient to explain in their own words to demonstrate understanding. Use the teach-back method to educate patients with low health literacy and improve comprehension and adherence in all patient populations.



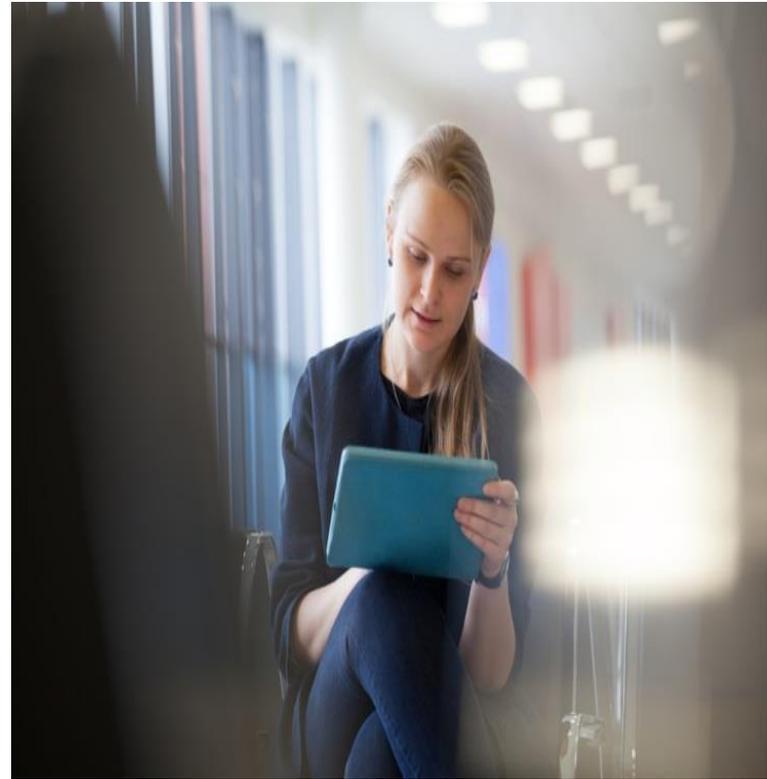
UTILIZE ASK ME 3™



Ask Me 3™, created by the National Patient Safety Foundation, is a patient education program designed to improve communication between patients and healthcare providers. It encourages patients to become active members of their healthcare team and promote improved health outcomes. The program encourages patients to ask their healthcare providers three questions: 1. What is my main problem? 2. What do I need to do? 3. Why is it important for me to do this? Studies show that people who understand health instructions make fewer mistakes when they take their medicine or prepare for a medical procedure.

IMPLEMENT PATIENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS

Knowing the patient's opinion of his experience in your office is invaluable and will help increase patient safety, reduce liability, and is an important part of a successful practice. The fact that patients do not complain does not necessarily mean they are satisfied with the care they are receiving. A patient satisfaction survey is a good tool for assessing the effectiveness of your physician-patient communication and patients' satisfaction with you and your staff's care.



AVOID BIAS



Physicians should be aware of any bias that may affect their care. An unconscious bias in healthcare can result in a positive or negative disposition towards a patient based on ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic status, looks, charisma, common interest, etc. Unrecognized bias may affect communication or the care offered to those individuals. Dislikes or stereotypes should not figure into clinical recommendations. Setting clear expectations through courtesy and tone can help eliminate biased informal communication.

USE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION DURING AN ADVERSE EVENT

Following an adverse event, effective communication with the patient and family throughout the process may improve the physician-patient relationship. Patients who experience a complication have been affected physically and emotionally. Understand the difference between empathy and apology. Empathic communications demonstrates recognition and understanding of the psychological impact this outcome has on the patient's physical and mental well-being. The patient may not remember the discussion, but will remember a disrespectful comment which may prevent further communication.

