

Healthcare Culture

Communication in the Healthcare Culture

- Sometimes communication problems occur when there is a cultural divide
- Information must be exchanged
 - Regularly
 - Clearly
 - Accurately

Breakdowns in Healthcare Communication=

- Incomplete patient histories
- Test Inaccuracies
- Billing errors
- Treatment oversights
- Incomplete patient teaching
- Poor followup
 - Prescription error
 - Misdiagnoses
 - Inadequate or incomplete treatment
 - Death

Healthcare System Culture

- It is expected that patients understand English
- It is expected that patients understand what it expected of them
- It is expected that patients agree with and understand practices
- It is expected that patients understand medical terminology
- It is expected that patients agree that the healthcare system knows “best”

Compliance

- The healthcare system and its professionals expect patient to comply with the treatment regimen.
- When patients do not comply they often are labeled as non-compliant.
- What does this even mean?

Non-Compliance in Healthcare

- Why would a patient actively or tacitly refuse to follow directions?
 - Culturally inappropriate
 - Financially unaffordable
 - Sociologically unfeasible
 - Language barrier
 - Educational barrier

Communication Process

- The purpose of communication is to address a patient's need.
 - Sender: the person who transmits the message
 - Message: The information being conveyed
 - Receiver: The person who gets the message
- Feedback: The communication process that evaluates the accuracy of the message.
 - Not always present in an exchange

Tips for Successful Verbal Communication

- Use normal everyday language.
 - Medical terminology sounds like a foreign language
- Speak slowly and clearly
 - Anxiety sometimes interferes with listening or understanding
- Always check to make sure the patient has understood you
 - Ask
 - Observe
 - Try again

Manner and Tone

- Volume and tone of voice can convey many things
 - Happiness
 - Boredom
 - Respect
 - Disrespect
- “I don’t have time to deal with you now so don’t ask questions or give me a hard time.”

Convey Competence

- When patients are anxious and confused the healthcare professional must
 - Convey confidence
 - Convey certainty
 - Convey willingness to explain and clarify thoroughly
 - Avoid reacting to patient anger

Seeing Eye to Eye

- In Western culture eye contact is valued
 - It implies honesty, caring and concern
- However:
- In some cultures eye contact is viewed as disrespectful
- In some cultures avoidance of eye contact is viewed as respect

Active Listening and Culture

- Listen with your ears
- Listen with your brain
- Listen with your cultural antenna
 - Give full attention to the patient or family member
 - Don't interrupt (unless you need to refocus)
 - Pay attention to body language and other non-verbal cues

Anger and Culture

- Sometimes anxiety is expressed as anger
 - Try to acknowledge anxiety
- Sometimes anger is an expression of feeling out of control
 - People don't necessarily feel safe in the impersonal healthcare system
- Sometimes anger is a response to feeling disrespected
 - Cultural mistakes take the form of disrespect

Culturally Aware responses

- Try to identify the source of the anger or anxiety
 - It isn't you
 - Listen but don't defend
 - Acknowledge the feelings
 - Don't argue with the patient or family member
- Offer the patient ways to be more in control
 - Be honest about costs, payment options, wait times, options
- Offer the patient ways to feel safer
 - Long waiting periods
 - Feeling ignored

Patient Education and Culture

- Be aware of the person in the family who wields authority.
 - Who is the decision maker?
 - Attitude toward healthcare system; males vs. females?
- Help the patient accept the illness/injury and need for treatment
 - If the family is in denial then the teaching won't be effective
- Involve the patient/family in the process of gaining knowledge and understanding (control).
- Provide positive reinforcement
 - This is not the first time you have done this teaching but it is the first time the patient is receiving it.

Patient Teaching and Culture

- Use verbal, written and pictures wherever possible
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your teaching
 - Be aware of cultural issues
 - Does the patient feel comfortable asking questions?
 - No questions doesn't necessarily mean complete understanding
 - Ask open ended questions to be sure the patient understands
 - Be sure the patient/family understands it is acceptable to call later with questions or need for clarification
 - Look interested
 - Look pleased to be having the interaction

Communication Challenges

- Consider culture
 - Neither you nor the patient may receive messages the way they are intended
- Language
 - Confusion or outright non-understanding
- Brain injuries/Cognitive Impairment
 - Be sure the patient is accompanied by a support person
- Be honest about costs, payment options, wait times, options

Communication challenges

- Sometimes religious or cultural practices are in conflict with institutional rules and/or common practice
 - Patient wants to be surrounded by members of his church/tribe etc. but hospital rules state only 2 visitors at a time.
 - Patient wants to fast on a religious holiday but this would be detrimental to her health and wellbeing.
- How should these or other instances be handled?

Telephone manners and Culture

- Telephone conversations with other cultures, with people with accents often lead to confusion. Why?
 - Be aware of your own accent
 - Speak slowly and clearly
 - Be prepared to repeat yourself
- Identify yourself and your office/department when answering
- Ask permission to put a caller on hold
 - wait for the response
- Always speak politely

Triaging calls...

- Caller 1: Wants an appointment for her son who has a temperature of 103.2 F but no other symptoms.
 - Caller 2: Wants to see the physician. He is having chest pains.
 - Caller 3: Angry. Has been disconnected 3 times. Has a question about her bill.
 - Caller 4: Needs a prescription refill
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- Identify the order in which the calls should be answered.
 - Give rationale.