Does Verbal vs. Visual Communication Change Patient Satisfaction?

Carl Dernell, MS, James M. Kinsman III, MD
UC Health Internal Medicine
University of Colorado School of Medicine – Colorado Springs Branch

BACKGROUND

- Health literacy is the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make health decisions
- Only 12 percent of adults have proficient health literacy
  - (National Assessment of Adult Literacy) (1)
- Low literacy has been linked to poor health outcomes:
  - Higher rates of hospitalization
  - Less frequent use of preventive services
  - Higher cost of care and healthcare burden
- Health literacy partly depends on the level of communication skills of both patients AND healthcare providers

OBJECTIVE

- We endeavored to investigate whether implementation of visual communication tools would increase self-reported patient satisfaction with physician communication

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality Used</th>
<th>Perfect Scores (Total # responses)</th>
<th>Average Reported Satisfaction (perfect = 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Discussion Only</td>
<td>59 (64)</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pen and Paper Visual Communication</td>
<td>15 (14)</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White board Visual Communication</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Preferred*:
- Verbal only - 8
- Pen and Paper - 4
- White Board - 1

ADDITIONAL QUESTION

- In our practice, patients reported near perfect satisfaction with their physician’s communication regardless of modality
- To further determine if using some type of visual communication would be welcome, I added an additional question to some patient surveys:
  - “Which communication tool would you prefer?”
  - The MAJORITY chose “verbal only (no diagrams at all)”
  - N=13

CONCLUSIONS

- Patients overwhelmingly reported a high degree of satisfaction with their physician’s communication, regardless of the communication modality used
- Perceived barrier:
  - Participating physicians commented that using visual modalities was often based on TIME CONSTRAINTS
  - Some question remained whether increased time would be worthwhile
- What Patients prefer:
  - the overwhelming majority preferred their physician use only verbal discussion, with no added visual communication modality

Next Steps

- While patients report a high degree of satisfaction with how their physician communicates with them, it is unknown how this correlates with true retention or comprehension of information
- PLAN - select a small cohort of patients that have filled out this survey
- At their next visit utilize either a visual aid (such as pen and paper listing the plan) or (control) use standard communication methods (similar to this project)
- ADDITIONALLY, ask them before they leave:
  1. What is something that changed with your medical plan of care?
  2. (if there was a medication change) What is the medication called that was changed? What is that for? What was the change?
- Responses will be graded for comprehension, simply the number of questions answered correctly
- COMPREHENSION might be increased, even if SATISFACTION doesn’t change, or even decreases
- It is recommended that primary care providers assess for comprehension (2), this project would help the participating office to assess AND TO DETERMINE WHAT HELPS IMPROVE comprehension

References
