

Teach-back, a tool for improved patient safety, equity, and person centered care

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Background

Good communication is one of the most important prerequisites for good health care, but also one of the hardest to achieve. Research has shown that between 40-80 percent of medical information provided by healthcare practitioners is forgotten immediately and almost half of the information that is remembered is incorrect. Cultural, language and communication barriers can lead to mutual misunderstandings between patients and their health care providers. An improvement of the patient-provider communication and relation provides an opportunity to improve both patient safety, health literacy and equity in health care. In order to accomplish a communication that builds on the provider's responsibility and that works both ways, the Centre for Equity in Health Care, at the Region Västra Götaland in Sweden developed Teach-back-R (revised).

Method

Teach-back is a simple technique that makes a huge difference. When professionals ask patients to repeat given information, to insure that the patient understood all important parts, teachback improves glycemic control, inhaler technique, and decreases readmission to hospitals. But it is not just about patients' capacity. Teach-back-R (revised) encourages professionals to evaluate their own communication skills, rather than to evaluate patients' abilities. Using Teach-back-R, the professional also summarizes information from the patient, thereby giving the patient the opportunity to complete and explain given information. These differences from the original Teach-back method help patients to become more active in consultations. To invite patients to be an equal part in a mutual conversation challenges a tradition of physician-dominated dialogues, provides an opportunity to engage patients as active participants, and strengthens their position in relation to their caregivers.

Outcome

Since we started to introduce our version of Teach-back to the Western Region of Sweden it has been implemented as a tool in most parts of health care. Teach-back-R has been recommended in the regional patient safety plan 2016, as a tool when the Swedish "patient law" was implemented, by the Swedish network for health enhancing hospitals, as a tool to improve health literacy, by the regional network for patient centered care, and as a tool to improve equity in health care. Ongoing studies explore the effects of Teach-back in the Swedish context as well as the effect of Teach-back-R on patients' sense of participation. Teach-back-R started out as a little project and entered health-care in Sweden nationwide, as a practical tool for how to translate ideas on a new patient-provider relationship into clinical practice. A participant in the Swedish national patient safety conference concluded: "So useful! So easy! So obvious when you explain it. We just have to introduce it!"

Conclusion

Teach-back-R is a method with a focus, not only on health care providers' obligations but on patients' rights to understand and benefit from information about their health and health care. To shift focus in healthcare towards a person centered way of working improves health and health care, with the patients (as persons) at the heart of their health care. Teach-back-R provides a simple tool, easy to use, to make the first step in that direction. After a workshop, held on the Swedish national patient safety conference in September 2016, participants gave feed-back like: "A new way of thinking which is actually just natural", "It is not the patient who cannot understand but me who explained badly", "This method has to be introduced everywhere!"