Using Simulated Patients to Enhance Health Literacy Communication and Patient Understanding

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**Introduction**

- The workshop addressed the health literacy gap that exists between patient understanding and the way health information is communication by physicians, their staff, and health care facilities.
- Employed standardized patient interviews to provide practice-based learning in a controlled, simulated clinical setting while providing lessons in a supportive, collaborative, and shame-free environment.
- The workshop was designed to encourage the development of skills and knowledge, while primarily serving as an effective exercise that will begin a process of life-long learning about health literacy competency and influence the behavior of physicians already in practice.
- Three rounds of pilot testing were conducted between July 2009 and June 2010 with 16 physicians and allied health professionals from a diverse range of specialties.

**Objectives**

At the conclusion of the workshop, the health care provider will be able to:

- Gain an understanding of the important role of health literacy and its influence on health behaviors, health outcomes, effective patient/provider communication and patient adherence compliance.
- Promote self reflection on individual provider’s own health literacy skills.
- Through the use of simulation, provide low risk, shame-free, authentic experience to enable providers to practice implementing health literacy skills.
- Tailor health literacy clinical practice protocols to meet the unique needs of their own practice environment.

**Protocol**

- **Self Reflection Exercise**
  - Consider health literacy challenges in own practice
  - Consider impact of health literacy challenges on health outcomes in own practice
- **Practice Information**
  - Reflect on individual goals for participating
  - Tailor Standardized Patient Experience to Individual practice
- **Standardized Patient Scenario One**
  - Orientation to Standardized Patient Experience
  - Self Assess Baseline Health Literacy Techniques
  - Feedback from Standardized Patient
- **AMA Video and Mentored Discussion**
  - Information Burst
  - Teaching Specific Techniques
  - Peer Mentoring and Coaching
- **Standardized Patient Scenario Two**
  - Self Assess /Self Reflection
  - Standardized Patient Feedback
  - Peer Coach Review of Video with Feedback
  - Group review of selected video segments
- **Standardized Patient Scenario Three**
  - Self Assess /Self Reflection
  - Standardized Patient Feedback
  - Peer Coach Review of Video with Feedback
  - Group review of selected video segments
- **Introduction to On-Line Resources**
  - Health care provider - specific
  - Patient-client specific
- **Standardized Patient Encounter Video Debrief**
  - Identify improvement points and promising practices
  - Reflect on integration into practice

**Findings**

Workshop participants were assessed before and after the workshop using a self-administered survey, which included both Likert scale and open ended questions. The non-parametric test related samples Wilcoxon-Signed Ranks Test was conducted. As shown in Table 1, participants’ knowledge and awareness about health literacy issues increased significantly as a result of the workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items for evaluation</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>P value*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and awareness about health literacy issues:</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Patient Understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• System Navigation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Patient Compliance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge about health literacy strategies and techniques:</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0.004</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teach-Back</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Flip It</td>
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</tbody>
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*Related Samples Wilcoxon-Signed Ranks Test

Participating physicians increased their knowledge of new health literacy techniques that have a potential to improve patient understanding and compliance with medical orders. Physicians who learn to use good health literacy techniques become more effective in communicating with their patients.