

Improving provider-patient interactions through patient-centered communication

Effective communication is key to providing quality health care. This can be especially important with obese patients who may have experienced negative interactions with providers because of weight bias. Patient-centered communication is an approach that providers can use to help patients feel understood and to increase their involvement in decisions that affect their health.

Patient centered care can include the following practices¹:

- (a) the provider explores the patients' main reason for the visit, concerns, and need for information;
- (b) the provider seeks an integrated understanding of the patients' world—that is, their whole person, emotional needs, and life issues;
- (c) the provider and patient finds common ground on what the problem is and mutually agrees on management;
- (d) the patient-provider interaction enhances prevention and health promotion;
- (e) the interaction enhances the continuing relationship between the patient and the doctor.

Here are some strategies to foster patient-centered communication²:

Build Rapport: welcome the patient by name and recognize any others with the patient

Open the Discussion: Establish the focus of the visit by eliciting the patient's agenda and negotiating a prioritized agenda together.

Gather Information: Use open-ended questions where possible, clarify and summarize information stated by the patient, and demonstrate active listening through both nonverbal (e.g., eye contact) and verbal (encouragement) techniques.

Understand the Patient's Perspective: Explore the patient's beliefs, concerns and expectations about health and illness, and acknowledge and respond to the patient's ideas and values.

Share Information: Use language that the patient can understand and check for his/her understanding while also encouraging questions from the patient.

Reach Agreement on Plans: Encourage the patient to participate in decision-making to the extent that he/she desires. Discuss the patient's willingness and ability to follow the plan and identify resources and support to help the patient achieve this goal.

Provide Closure: Encourage questions from the patient, summarize agreement plan, and discuss follow-up.

¹Little P, Everitt H, Williamson I, Warner G, Moore M, Gould C, et al. Preferences of patients for patient centred approach to consultation in primary care: observational study. *BMJ*. 2001;322:468–472.

²<http://www.fammed.washington.edu/predoctoral/clerkship/forms/pccobs.html>

