Teach-back:
A Health Literacy Tool to Ensure Patient Understanding

Presentation created by The Iowa Health System Health Literacy Collaborative
Objectives - After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Define teach-back and its purpose
- Describe the key elements for using teach-back correctly
- Use teach-back in the clinical setting
Health Literacy

• ...the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

  Ratzan & Parker, 2000

• ...the ability to read, understand, and use health information to make appropriate healthcare decisions and follow instructions for treatment.

  AMA & AMA Foundation, 2003
How Patients Feel

- Patients may have negative feelings and emotions related to their limited reading ability or limited understanding.

  Institute of Medicine, 2004

- The health care environment can make it hard for patients to tell us they don’t read well or do not understand.

- They hide this with a variety of coping techniques.

  Parikh N Pt Educ and Counseling 1996
The Right to Understand

- Patients have the right to understand healthcare information that is necessary for them to safely care for themselves, and to choose among available alternatives.

- Healthcare providers have a duty to provide information in simple, clear, and plain language and to check that patients have understood the information before ending the conversation.

The 2005 White House Conference on Aging; Mini-Conference on Health Literacy and Health Disparities.
The Challenge

- Research shows that patients remember and understand less than half of what clinicians explain to them.

Ley, Communicating with patients: improving communication satisfaction, and compliance 1988

Rost, Predictors of recall of medication regimens and recommendations for lifestyle change in elderly patients 1987.
Universal Communication Principles

- **Everyone** benefits from clear information.

- Many patients are at risk of misunderstanding, but it is hard to identify them.

- Testing general reading levels does not ensure patient understanding in the clinical setting.

Adapted from: *Reducing the Risk by Designing a Safer, Shame-Free Health Care Environment*. AMA, 2007
Talking with Patients & Families

Always:

- Use Plain Language.
- Slow down.
- Break it down into short statements.
- Focus on the 2 or 3 most important concepts.
- Check for understanding using **teach-back**.
Teach-back

- Why do I use it?
- What is it?
- How do I use it?
- When do I use it?
Teach-back is…

- Asking patients to repeat in their own words what they need to know or do, in a non-shaming way.

- **NOT** a test of the patient, but of how well you explained a concept.

- A chance to check for understanding and, if necessary, re-teach the information.
Teach-back is Supported by Research

- “Asking that patients recall and restate what they have been told” is one of 11 top patient safety practices based on the strength of scientific evidence.”
  
  AHRQ, 2001 Report, Making Health Care Safer

- “Physicians’ application of interactive communication to assess recall or comprehension was associated with better glycemic control for diabetic patients.”
  
  Schillinger, Arch Intern Med/Vol 163, Jan 13, 2003, “Closing the Loop”
Asking for a Teach-back - Examples

Ask patients to demonstrate understanding, using their own words:

- “I want to be sure I explained everything clearly. Can you please explain it back to me so I can be sure I did?”

- “What will you tell your husband about the changes we made to your blood pressure medicines today?”

- “We’ve gone over a lot of information, a lot of things you can do to get more exercise in your day. In your own words, please review what we talked about. How will you make it work at home?”
Teach-back...

● Creates an opportunity for dialogue in which the provider gives information, then asks the patient to respond and confirm understanding before adding any new information.

● Re-phrase if a patient is not able to repeat the information accurately.

● Ask the patient to teach back the information again, using their own words, until you are comfortable they really understand it.

● If they still do not understand, consider other strategies.
Teach-Back: Closing the Loop

New Concept: Health Information, Advice, or Change in Management

Clinician Explains New Concept

Patient Recalls and Comprehends

Adherence

Clinician Assesses Patient Recall and Comprehension

Clinician Clarifies and Tailors Explanation

Clinician Reassesses Patient Recall and Comprehension

Teach-back – Additional Points

- Do **not** ask yes/no questions like:
  - “Do you understand?”
  - “Do you have any questions?”

- For more than one concept:
  - “Chunk and Check”
    - Teach the 2-3 main points for the first concept & check for understanding using teach-back…
    - Then go to the next concept
Teach-back – Using it Well: Elements of Competence

- Responsibility is on the provider.
- Use a caring tone of voice & attitude.
- Use Plain Language.
- Ask patient to explain using their own words (not yes/no).
- Use for all important patient education, specific to the condition.
- Document use of & response to teach-back.
Patient Rights

It is neither just, nor fair, to expect a patient to make appropriate health decisions and safely manage his/her care without first understanding the information needed to do so.

Reducing the Risk by Designing a Safer, Shame-Free Health Care Environment. AMA, 2007
“In the absence of teach-back, the only indicator of misunderstanding may be a medication mistake or patient error, which could be harmful.”

There were “surprising misconceptions of patients’ understanding of instructions. Nonverbal cues do not seem reliable.”

Dr. Fred Marsh, 2004
Questions to Consider

- What are specific topics or directions you commonly discuss with your patients that you can use the teach-back method with?
  - Ideas: Insulin injections, inhalers, medication changes, chronic disease self-care, colonoscopy prep

- How can you phrase your teach-back questions? Brainstorm and discuss how you can ask questions for the scenarios above.
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