

Health Literacy Integration & Patient Assessment

I have learned a lot about effective patient education through my capstone project. Last year, when Novant adopted the Ask Me 3 Teach back model (National Patient Safety Foundation), we were shown a video clip of a young mother attempting to read a prescription bottle that held medicine for her child. She could not read the directions properly and so she guessed on dosage! I was really surprised and saddened to learn that this is not the exception for our patients. My next thought was that the woman had not asked her healthcare provider for help in understanding how to use the medication. Why not? Do my patients ask me for help if they do not understand what I teach them?

The Ask Me 3 model is advantageous. It is designed in a question-type format that facilitates dialogue between the patient and provider. A patient who might not normally ask questions is encouraged to do so. When I first drafted my BPPV and orthostatic hypotension handouts, I gave patients the appropriate handouts. I asked him/her to read it and on the next treatment date, asked him/her to tell me what the diagnosis/condition was, what could cause it, how it is treated and why he/she needed to participate in treatment. Most patients answered about 75% of the questions correctly. I was very encouraged! It was great that I could review the information with them while they held a copy of it in their hands. Assessing patient understanding by asking questions that the handouts contain is very clear and simple.

I included questions about the helpfulness of my handouts and suggestions for improvement when I revised my patient assessment forms. When responding to these questions, patients tended to ask me more questions about dizziness in general (other causes of dizziness, why they had aural fullness, how much is enough water to drink, etc) as opposed to giving me concrete ideas about how to improve the handouts. All patients did state that they would like to see photos of the “ear rocks.”

The Ask Me 3 model follows many of the CDC’s “Simply Put” (2009) guidelines for healthcare literacy. Increasing font size to 12 or greater and font styles such as the one for this paper (Georgia) is one of the recommendations that a project committee member made to me. Similar font size and style help make patient handouts legible and compatible with one another across the Novant system. Another change that I was asked to make was to come up with a common name for the diagnosis that could be written in parentheses next to the medical name so that patients could better understand it. This was a little tricky but I chose “vertigo” to put next to “BPPV” and “becoming dizzy when getting up” to put beside “orthostatic hypotension.” I think it is good for patients to hear a layman’s term for their diagnosis but it is equally important for them to learn the medical term for it. Patients will likely hear the medical term again and will be better empowered if they know what it is when they interact with future healthcare providers.

Coming up with common words, simple sentences and clear information was challenging. I spent a lot of time with my online thesaurus and was able to get the grade levels down to around 6.5-6.7. Terms like “orthostatic hypotension,” “benign” and “paroxysmal” automatically bumped up the reading level but when edited out of the document, the reading level was appropriate. My committee members reckoned that as

long as these medical terms are explained in plain language, they are okay to keep in the handouts.

One thing that is frustrating about the Novant format style is that the background is the same for all handouts. They all have a Novant logo and a magnifying glass on them and I was told that other photos were not commonly accepted. This is a problem for my BPPV handout because patients do not readily understand that BPPV is a mechanical problem of the inner ear. Rather, they expect that I should be able to look inside their ear and see the crystals! A photo of the inner ear and semicircular canals is really essential in trying to explain BPPV. I found a photo that I like and if Novant will not clear my handout to have a photo on it, I may make my own copies of photos to take in to my patients.

References

CDC. (2009). Simply Put. Retrieved on 12 March 2012,

http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply_Put.pdf

National Patient Safety Foundation. (No date). Ask Me 3. Retrieved on 12 March 2012,

<http://www.npsf.org/for-healthcare-professionals/programs/ask-me-3/>