

Educated patients – Better treatment compliance and more successful outcomes

Patient education is an important, yet complex issue. Most doctors acknowledge the need for and value of educating their patients about their health issues, medications, etc., but many find it difficult if not impossible to incorporate much in the way of patient education into their practices. Increasingly, many doctors feel pressured to see more patients in a day, resulting in less time to spend with each patient.

The burden for education shouldn't fall solely on the shoulder of doctors and other healthcare practitioners. Patients should ultimately hold themselves responsible for making sure they're educated about their health, specific health issues and conditions, their medications, and lifestyle issues that impact their health.

Why is patient education so important? For a number of reasons...

- Taking one chronic pain disease as an example, studies have shown that adding patient education to standard medical management of Migraine improved the clinical status of Migraineurs and reduced their need for health care such as doctor's appointments.
- Educated patients tend to be more invested in their treatment, working with their doctors toward effective treatment regimens rather than expecting their doctors to write them a prescription that will magically make everything better.
- There are times when pain patients must make treatment decisions for themselves. They cannot call their doctors for every pain episode. Thus, they must sometimes decide for themselves what medication to take, when to take it, and when they need to call their doctors for assistance.
- Being better educated about their health issues helps patients feel less powerless and less dependent on their healthcare team.
- Educated patients are more compliant with their treatment regimens, do better with self-care and have better overall outcomes.
- Social functioning and general health improve in educated patients.
- In a Norwegian study of the effects of patient education in COPD, patient education significantly reduced the number of primary care physician visits and use of relief medications as well as improving patient satisfaction with how their disease was handled. Patient outcomes increased and costs decreased.

Especially with today's media and multimedia options, today's patient has more educational opportunities than ever before. Obviously, physicians and other healthcare professionals will always be a primary source of education. Some other sources of educational information include:

- Pharmacists: Pharmacists can be dependable sources of information on medications. When filling a prescription, patients should be sure they get the patient information sheet that's available, then file it for future reference.
- The Internet: Statistics show that with the exception of their doctors, patients get more health information from the Internet than any other source. Caution should be exercised, however, to use sites that are reputable and provide accurate and up-to-date information.
- Books: The fast-growing segment of the book publishing industry is health. Once again, good judgment needs to be exercised. Information isn't necessarily accurate just because someone publishes it in a book.
- Magazines and television programs. Again, the same cautionary note applies.

Summary

Good patient education can be priceless to both physician and patient. A patient who is educated about his or her health issues is far better prepared to work with their doctor as a partner in managing their health. Those patients are also more likely to have an internal locus — not expecting the doctor to “fix” everything, but relying on themselves as well. Fewer doctor visits, less medication, better compliance, better outcomes, and reduced costs are all products of solid patient education. All of this leads to healthier patients and makes treatment easier for their physicians.

Resources:

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