

Connecting Patients and Physicians: A librarian's role in encouraging communication

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Introduction

This project embedded a medical librarian in an university outpatient clinic to assist patients in finding health information and clarifying questions for their doctors.

Hypothesis

Patients provided with quality consumer health information at an appropriate literacy level and assisted with preparing questions before their clinic visit will have more productive interactions with their health care providers.

Methods

- A librarian attended the University of Florida's Internal Medicine and Medical Specialties (IMMS) Clinic for 4 hours a week over 9 weeks from May – July 2012.
- A laptop with WIFI connections and mobile printer were set up in a corner of the waiting room for the librarian to provide individual patient consultations.



Study Populations

Population 1: Physicians - 7

- 3 Residents and 4 Attendings
 - Pre-intervention survey
 - Post-intervention survey

Population 2: Patients - 12

- Survey on computer access and preferred learning styles

Results - Patients

12 patients identified

25 questions for their doctors.

Questions related to:

- medications
- symptoms
- disease
- treatment



Sample Questions Identified with Patients

- What is pancrealipase used for? Why do I need to take it? It is very expensive!
- What are the treatments for pulmonary fibrosis (PF)? Are there clinical trials? Is PF linked to occupational exposure -- working in shipyards or chemical plants?
- My heart is racing and the doctor wants to put me on a 30 day heart monitor. Is there something that won't take as long? Why isn't the doctor more concerned?
- "Is scalp itching related to kidney disease?"

Resources Used

- **MedlinePlus.gov**
 - **Health Topics and Drug Topics**
- **PubMed for journal articles**
- **Clinical Trials.gov**
- **Shands Mychart electronic patient record**
- **Needy Meds**
- **Prescription formularies (WalMart, Target)**
- **Association websites**
 - **Pulmonary Fibrosis Association**
 - **Alzheimer's Association**
 - **Neurofibromatosis Foundation**

Sample Patient Encounter

What are my options for treating external hemorrhoids?

Information identified:

- **MedlinePlus.gov** -- anatomical drawings, patient handouts, patient interactive tutorials
- 1. **PubMed** -- *American Family Physician* article on treatment of hemorrhoids
- **Cochrane Systematic Review** suggested one procedure was better than another in reducing recurrence of hemorrhoids.

Sample Patient Encounter

I have fibromyalgia. Lyrica is not helping the pain. In another state I had used TENS and physical therapy which did help.

Questions identified for the doctor:

When might I begin to feel better using the *Lyrica*?

Is physical therapy an option for me now? If not, why not?

Information identified:

- **Medlineplus** about *Lyrica*
- **PubMed** - an article on the use of physical therapy for fibromyalgia.

Sample Physician Encounter

I need information on diabetes in Arabic. My patient is returning to Saudi Arabia where he needs to educate his family about his condition, its management and the lifestyle changes he needs to make.

Information identified:

MedlinePlus - Multiple languages

20 bilingual booklets in English and Arabic

RHIN.org

116 items including audios, videos and documents

Results - Physicians

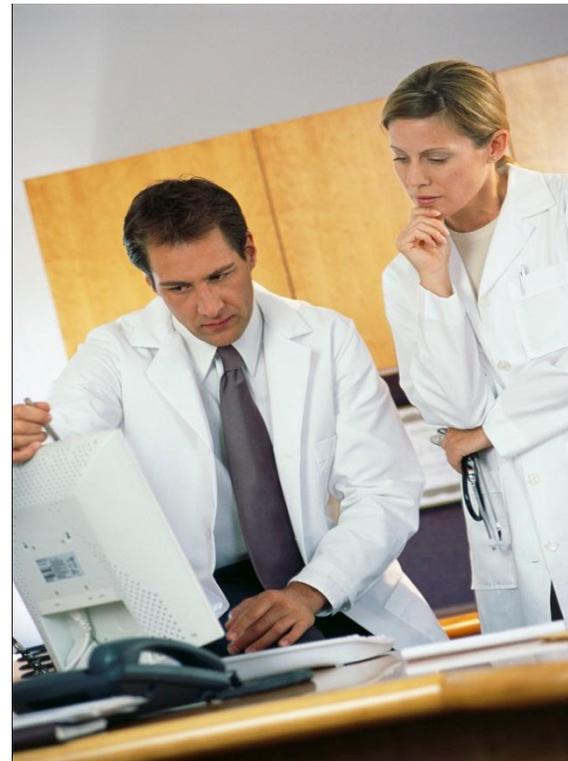
- 4 of 7 physicians saw patients who had met with the librarian.
- 3 of the 4 physicians reported that the patients benefited from the interaction.
- 3 of the 4 physicians reported that the interaction with the librarian did not increase their patient visit time.
- 1 physician reported that the interaction did increase their patient visit time.

Requests for Health Information

6 of 7 physicians want information to share with patients.

Topics requested:

- Asthma
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Weight loss
- Medication use
- High cholesterol



Conclusions

- Responses to the intervention have been positive.
- Patients like to receive new information in multiple ways. They reported using 2 or more methods.
- Hearing was the most reported single method.
- Although patients use computers, their access to the internet is more limited.
- Physicians were open to our intervention promoting better informed patients.
- Most physicians most found this added value without prolonging the visit time.

Lessons Learned

- Choose the right partners.
- Active outreach is essential.
- Clinic staff participation is key.
- IRB process is an education for librarians and for the people who are reading proposals.
- Patients, providers and IRB reviewers are unsure of librarians' roles and abilities, and the resources librarians can provide.

More Lessons Learned

- Patient recruitment takes energy and is an art.
- Patients respond more to verbal invitations to participate than they do printed flyers.
- Multiple sources and formats of health information are needed to meet different learning styles.
- Document everything.

Future Plans

- Continue the project for 8 hours per week through Spring 2013 with funding from Gatorade Research Fund.
- Expand client base to all IMMS specialties.
- Advertise the librarian's hours in the clinic.
- Involve clinic staff more.
- Consider scheduling appointments for patients to meet with librarian.

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