

A Librarian's Role in Encouraging Communication between Patients and Physicians

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Hypothesis

Patients who are provided with quality consumer health information at an appropriate literacy level and assisted with preparing questions before their doctor's appointment will have more productive interactions with their health care providers.

Methods

A librarian attended two 4-hour clinic sessions in the University of Florida's Internal Medicine and Medical Specialties (IMMS) clinic over -- weeks to capture the "teachable" moment.

Participants in the IRB approved study :
--physicians (residents and attendings)
87 patients

Initial surveys asked physicians about their experience with patients being informed and actively participating in the clinical encounter.

Patients were asked about their preferred learning styles and computer access.

Physicians and patients were asked to assess how this communication/information intervention impacted their clinic visits.

Resources Used to Assist Patients

A computer with WIFI connection and printer were set up in corner of the waiting room for the librarian-patient consultations.

MedlinePlus.gov
PubMed for journal articles
Clinical Trials.gov
Shands Mychart contacts
Needy Meds
Prescription formularies (WalMart, Target)
Association websites:
Pulmonary Fibrosis Association
Alzheimer's Association
Neurofibromatosis Foundation



Questions Identified by Patients

- What is pancrealipase? 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?
- What is CREST syndrome? Are body sores a symptom or side effect of medications?
- 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? Does this mean the doctor is not concerned?
- Is scalp itching related to kidney disease?

Selected Patient Encounters

What are my options for treating external hemorrhoids?

Information identified:

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

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

During the discussion the librarian learned that the current physician had not been told about the past treatment and suggested this was important. The patient did not realize she could ask her doctor for a physical therapy referral.

Questions identified for the doctor:

When might I begin to feel better with 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.

When the patient left the clinic, she told the librarian that she had been given a physical therapy referral.

Specific Physician Request

Please provide 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 audio, video and documents

Results

During the study patients asked 25 questions relating to medications, symptoms, disease and treatment.

Patients like to receive new information in multiple ways, i.e. reading, hearing, seeing pictures, and interacting.

Although patients use computers, their internet access is more limited.

Physicians report use of the comment card and librarian consultation did not change office visit time.

Physicians would like information to give their patients on the following topics:

Asthma	Weight loss
High blood pressure	Medication use
Diabetes	High cholesterol

Responses to the intervention have been positive.



Conclusions

Patient-physician communication is critical to clinical encounters and improving health outcomes. Librarians partnering with health care providers and patients in clinical venues can encourage such communication while simultaneously improving health education. Although our study population was small this project provides useful data and experience.

Lessons Learned

- Clinicians and patients are unaware of librarian's abilities and resources librarians can provide.
- Active outreach is essential.
- Patient recruitment takes energy and is an art.
- Clinic staff participation is key.
- Patients respond more to verbal invitations to participate than they do printed flyers.
- Multiple formats of health information are needed to meet different learning styles.

Future Directions

- Expand the project to 8 hours per week through Spring 2013 with funding from Department of Medicine Gatorade research dollars.
- Extend service to include all IMMS clinic specialties and their patients.
- Advertise the librarian's hours in the clinic.
- Consider scheduling appointments.
- Hold session about the project for clinic staff.
- Develop topical lists of resources on MD requested topics.

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