



Provider and Patient

Communication Guide





Purpose of this guide

We hope you and your office staff will find this guide an informative tool in helping your patients:

- Understand their care.
- Follow directions for their care.
- Feel comfortable with bringing concerns to your attention.

The guide also provides information for staff that can lead to improved patient outcomes, including:

- The role culture plays in patient care.
- Tips and Techniques to improve patient health care and safety knowledge.
- Health literacy warning signs and ways to address the issue.

Provider Responsibility

It is your responsibility to make sure you respect and support the member's right to receive information. It is also your responsibility to create an office where patients are comfortable asking questions. Your office staff can help! They are the first and last to see the patient. It is crucial that your staff recognize how culture, health literacy and an open environment can improve your patients' health and wellbeing.

Developed by

This guide is a collaborative effort of several AHCCCS contractors, called "C3." The C3 team is an established group that creates patient education tools and resources for providers. These tools teach patients how to follow their medical and pharmaceutical treatments, improve their health through simple to follow self-care practices and decrease unsafe risks.

Getting Started

Review this guide in detail. Practice and reinforce the concepts in this guide with your office staff. Hold each other accountable.

At the end of this guide is a checklist. Make copies of this checklist and provide to your patients before you meet with them. If needed, ask them if they would like you to complete the checklist on their behalf.

We need to work together to make sure the best health outcomes are achieved!



What is Health Literacy?

Health Literacy is defined by the National Health Education Standards as “the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways which are health-enhancing.”

Why is it important?

Because health illiteracy affects nearly half of all American adults (90 million people), it is most likely that your patients fall into this category. This means, adults with low literacy are:

- Not able to understand written instructions on prescription drug bottles, appointment slips, referrals, medical education brochures, doctor’s directions and consent forms.
- More likely to have more hospital visits, ER visits and remain in the hospital nearly two days longer than adults with high health literacy.
- Not able to navigate the health care system.

Everyone Benefits

Everyone benefits from clear communication. Don't assume anything about your patient's ability to understand medical information or navigate the health care system. We all could use help. Members have the right to talk with their PCP to get complete and current information about their health care condition so that they can make informed decisions about their health care.

Facts about your patients!

It is the provider's responsibility to make sure that they get this information and understand it completely. Providers, who are sensitive to the fact that their patients may not have good feelings about their ability to understand or read information, will have better outcomes than those who disregard this aspect of patient care and safety.

- Up to 90% of patients forget what their doctor tells them as soon as they leave the doctor's office.
- Nearly 50% of what patients DO remember is recalled incorrectly.
- Patients don't ask questions because they are ashamed to admit they don't understand instructions.

Practicing good health literacy tips/techniques may assist you to:

- Treat your patients with respect and dignity while engaging them in their own health management.
- Improve health care delivery and outcomes.
- Decrease repeat office, ER and hospital visits.
- Decrease unnecessary lab tests.
- Increase adherence to medical regimen.
- Improve office staff cultural and linguistic competency.
- Start solving problems related to member non-compliance with treatment and appointment schedule.

Listen to what they say

Look for clues that a patient may have low literacy

I forgot my glasses.

My eyes are tired.

I'll take this home for my family to read.

*What does this say?
I don't understand this.*

Watch how they act

- Not getting their prescriptions filled, or not taking their medications as prescribed.
- Consistently arriving late to appointments.
- Returning forms without completing them.
- Requiring several calls between appointments to clarify



Provider Tips: Prepare, Practice and Review

Patients are now encouraged to ask questions of their health care provider. The National Patient Safety Foundation created Ask Me 3. These are the following three questions that patients can use to get a better understanding of their medical conditions:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

1 Prepare

- Encourage your patients to use the Ask Me 3 questions.
- Post the Ask Me 3 posters in your office.
- Get to know your patients = create a safe environment to talk to them about their beliefs or understandings of their health problem.
- Use a variety of ways to meet the needs of different types of learners and cultures.
- Understanding how culture plays a role in adhering to and understanding health management:
 - a. Family involvement. Family plays a role in managing the health care of the patient and/or making decisions.
 - b. Diet restrictions. Foods that are commonly eaten by certain cultures are sometimes restricted. Help your patient understand how to modify their intake of these foods.
 - c. Medication. Taking or not taking medicines are driven by culture. Some cultures believe in a natural remedy. If there are more natural supplements, talk to your patient about how to or not to use these.
 - d. Speaking up. Some cultures feel that speaking up is challenging the doctor and this is disrespectful. Let your patient know that you would like them to speak up.

2 Practice

- Use simple words.
 - a. Avoid jargon.
 - b. Do not use acronyms.
 - c. Avoid technical language (if possible).
- Give information in small chunks.
 - a. Focus on key behaviors or actions that the patient must take.
- “Read” written instructions out loud.
- Reinforce.
 - a. Speak slowly (don’t shout).
 - b. Use body language to support what you are saying.
 - c. Draw pictures, use posters, models or physical demonstrations.
 - d. When using written materials, circle or highlight key information.
- Get Help.
 - a. Use video and audio media as an alternative to written information.
 - b. Use medically trained interpreters.

3 Review

- Ask open ended questions.
 - a. Some people may not know how to write, so asking them to write would not be appropriate. You will need to solicit their input by asking open ended questions.
- Ask the patient if they would like you to write down for them so that they can share this information with others.
- Ask patients to repeat back to you.
 - a. Then you affirm by repeating back! Use affirmation “Yes, that’s right...or Let me see if I can say it another way...”.

Provider Tips: Communication is a two-way street

Providers can lead a respectful two way conversation with their patients to ensure that they have communicated effectively and the patient understands their health situation and how to care for their health. Here are two simple actions:

1. Provide information in a plain, simple and clear language.
2. Check for understanding before ending the conversation.

Providers show respect and support for the patient's right to get information by creating an open, comfortable environment. Office staff can help! They are the first and last to see the patient. Share everything you know about cultures, health literacy and creating an open environment with your staff.



Teach Back/Show Me Method

The “teach back method” is the easy way for doctors to determine if they have effectively communicated to their patient their health information. It is a respectful way to approach a patient without making them feel shameful. It is a test of how well you explained things, not how well the patient understood! Most importantly, it is a chance for providers to teach over or explain differently to the patient before the patient leaves the office. It is more efficient and results in better health outcomes than waiting for the patient to leave. At the heart of this is the patient’s safety and understanding.

Teach back method: checking for understanding before ending a conversation.

Examples:

I want to make sure that I explained everything to you; could you tell me how you would describe your medical condition?

Can you show me how you will check your blood sugar levels?

I want to make sure that I have answered all of your questions, what questions do you think that your family members may ask of you about your doctor’s visit?

We’ve gone over a lot of information today, what are the two or three things that you are going to do?

Repeat it back = once the patient has explained everything to you, you affirm by repeating back! Yes, that’s right...or Let me see if I can say it another way...

Start, Stop and Continue Method of Reinforcement

Patients not only need to know what they have to do differently, they also need to know what they are currently doing well that they should continue to do. Here's a simple technique that will help you summarize your patient's actions.

Stop:

What behaviors does the patient need to stop doing that is getting in the way of their care?

Start:

What things does the patient need to start doing to take better care of their condition?

Continue:

What are the things that the patient currently is doing that they need to continue to do? These are positive things that are working well given their health condition.

Patient checklist

Medicines to take (and/or stop taking)

Next Appointment

Stop, Start and Continue

Stop (What behaviors does the patient need to stop doing that is getting in the way of their care?)

Start (What things does the patient need to start doing to take better care of their condition?)

Continue (What are the things that the patient currently is doing that they need to continue to do?)

Talk to your doctor before you leave the office

1. What else do you need to know about your health problem?
2. What do you need to do to get better? Medicines to take, food to eat/not eat, other places for help?
3. Why is it important for to follow these directions?
4. What's next? Prepare for next appointment