

Teaching Tips

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Department of Family & Social Medicine Faculty Development E-Newsletter



Health Literacy: Teaching the “Teach-Back” Method

When was the last time you closed an office visit by asking your patient if they understand their diagnosis and treatment plan or have any questions for you, and their response was just “yes” and “no”?

As a healthcare provider, it is essential to remember that many patients feel uncomfortable admitting when they don't understand something you've told them. The teach-back method is a useful interviewing tool for improving provider-patient communication. Introducing the teach-back to students early in their clinical training is one important step in teaching effective communication to promote patient satisfaction, increase treatment adherence, and improve health outcomes.

Steps of the teach-back:

1. Explain to the patient what they need to know about their diagnosis, treatment or future care, remembering to always:
 - Use plain language
 - Speak slowly
 - Break information down into short statements
 - Focus on 2-3 main points
2. Ask the patient to explain in their own words what they need to know or do. Emphasize that you are not testing them, but rather checking to see how well you explained the concepts.
3. When presenting multiple concepts “chunk and check” by teaching 2-3 main points for the first concept then employing the teach-back to check for understanding. Repeat with each new concept presented.
4. If the patient does not seem to understand the diagnosis or treatment plan as initially explained, you now have the opportunity to clarify before they leave the office, which can improve adherence.

Instead of asking...

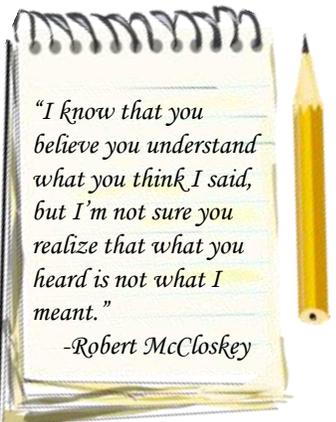
“Do you understand?”

“Do you have any questions?”

Say...

“I want to be sure I explained your treatment plan clearly. Please tell me in your own words what the plan is.”

“How would describe your treatment plan to a friend or family member?”



Worried about time?
According to Kripalani & Weiss, assessing a patient's baseline understanding generally takes less than 30 seconds and the teach-back takes just 1-2 minutes.

References / Resources:

Kripalani S, Weiss BD. Teaching about health literacy and clear communication. *J Gen Intern Med* 2006;21:888-90.

Schilling D, Piette J, Grumbach et al. Closing the loop: Physician communication with diabetic patients who have low health literacy. *Arch of Intern Med* 2003;163:83-90.

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Teaching Tips is a monthly e-newsletter for Faculty, Residents, and Community Preceptors sponsored by the DFSM Faculty Development Fellowship at Montefiore Medical Center. *Teaching Tips* will include practical teaching techniques for busy physicians who want to enhance teaching and learning at their clinical practices. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for future topics for *Teaching Tips* please contact Ellen Tattelman at etattelm@montefiore.org or Molly FitzGerald at mofitzge@montefiore.org.