

# Empowering Patients through Better Health Communication

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## Introduction

Effective health communication is a cornerstone of patient empowerment, enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their care, improving adherence to treatment plans, and enhancing overall health outcomes. The growing recognition of the need for patient-centered care emphasizes the importance of not just providing medical information, but doing so in a way that is accessible, understandable, and actionable for patients. As healthcare systems evolve, the role of communication has expanded beyond simple information sharing to encompass building trust, fostering collaboration, and encouraging patients to take an active role in their health [1].

One of the first steps in empowering patients is ensuring they have access to clear and accurate information. However, in a world where medical knowledge is vast and often complex, this can be a significant challenge. Many patients struggle to understand medical terminology, treatment options, and the implications of various health conditions. Without a clear understanding, patients are less likely to engage meaningfully with their healthcare providers and may have difficulty following through on treatment recommendations. To overcome these barriers, healthcare professionals must prioritize the use of plain language, avoiding jargon or overly technical terms that could confuse or overwhelm patients. Simplifying language is not about dumbing down the information but rather about making it accessible so that patients feel confident in their ability to comprehend and act upon it.

## Description

In addition to simplifying language, the method of communication is just as important. Traditional face-to-face consultations have long been the gold standard for healthcare delivery, but in today's increasingly digital world, other forms of communication such as telemedicine, patient portals, and mobile health applications are becoming more common. These digital platforms provide patients with easier access to their health information and direct communication with their care teams. They also allow for more frequent, asynchronous interactions that can help address concerns between appointments, further supporting patient autonomy [2]. However, the shift to digital health tools presents new challenges in communication, especially for patients who may not be comfortable with technology or those who face barriers related to digital literacy. Healthcare providers need to ensure that digital tools are intuitive and provide support for patients who might struggle with their use. This means offering training, creating user-friendly interfaces, and ensuring that digital tools complement not replaces the interpersonal communication that is still essential in building a trusting relationship between patients and providers.

Patient empowerment is also deeply tied to the involvement of patients in shared decision-making. In traditional healthcare models, decisions about treatment are often made by the provider with little input from the patient.

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However, modern healthcare is increasingly embracing a more collaborative approach. Shared decision-making involves both the patient and the provider actively engaging in discussions about treatment options, considering the patient's preferences, values, and unique circumstances. This approach not only fosters a sense of control for patients but also leads to better outcomes. Research has shown that when patients are involved in decisions about their care, they are more likely to adhere to treatment plans, experience higher satisfaction with their care, and achieve better health outcomes.

The key to shared decision-making is effective communication patients must have the information they need to weigh the risks and benefits of various options, and healthcare providers must listen to and respect patients' preferences and concerns. This requires healthcare providers to be not only knowledgeable but also empathetic, creating an environment where patients feel comfortable asking questions, expressing doubts, and voicing their opinions. However, communication is not only about delivering information but also about listening actively to the concerns, fears, and desires of patients. Many patients have unique concerns about their health that go beyond the physical symptoms they may be experiencing. Emotional and psychological factors often play a significant role in how individuals perceive and manage their health. For example, a patient with a chronic illness may feel overwhelmed by the idea of managing their condition for the long term, while someone facing a difficult diagnosis may struggle with feelings of anxiety or fear about the future [3].

Addressing these emotional aspects of healthcare requires healthcare professionals to be not only skilled communicators but also compassionate listeners. Active listening is an essential skill that fosters trust and rapport, allowing patients to feel heard and understood. When patients feel that their concerns are taken seriously, they are more likely to be open about their symptoms, challenges, and preferences, which ultimately lead to more effective care. Another crucial component of empowering patients through communication is addressing health literacy. Health literacy refers to an individual's ability to understand, interpret, and act upon health information. Low health literacy is a significant barrier to patient empowerment, affecting a large portion of the population. Patients with low health literacy may have difficulty understanding prescription instructions, navigating the healthcare system, or comprehending the risks and benefits of different treatments [4].

This can lead to medication errors, missed appointments, and non-adherence to treatment regimens, all of which can result in poorer health outcomes. It is estimated that nearly 9 out of 10 adults struggle to understand and use everyday health information, highlighting the need for healthcare professionals to take steps to improve health literacy among their patients. Improving health literacy involves more than just simplifying language; it also requires using a variety of communication methods to ensure that information is understood and retained. Visual aids, diagrams, videos, and written materials can complement verbal communication and help reinforce key messages. For example, a healthcare provider might use a diagram to explain how a particular medication works in the body or provide a video that demonstrates how to use a medical device. In addition, healthcare providers should offer patients opportunities to ask questions and repeat back information to ensure understanding. This interactive approach promotes better comprehension and retention of important health information. Furthermore, the patient's cultural background and personal preferences play an essential role in how health information is received and interpreted. Culture influences how patients perceive health, illness, and the healthcare system. Patients from different cultural backgrounds may have different beliefs about the causes of illness, the role of healthcare providers, and acceptable treatments.

For instance, some cultures may place a greater emphasis on traditional or alternative medicine, while others may prioritize biomedical approaches.

Understanding these cultural factors and adapting communication strategies to align with the patient's values is key to ensuring effective health communication. This is particularly important in diverse societies where patients may not speak the dominant language or may have different expectations of their healthcare providers. Culturally competent communication involves not only language translation but also being sensitive to the patient's cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Another aspect of empowering patients through communication is providing ongoing support and follow-up. Empowerment does not end with a single conversation; it requires continued engagement and reinforcement. Healthcare professionals should create opportunities for patients to revisit information, clarify doubts, and discuss any changes in their condition or treatment plan.

Follow-up calls, reminder systems, and educational resources can help keep patients engaged in their care and provide them with the necessary tools to make informed decisions. Moreover, patients should be encouraged to take ownership of their health by setting goals, tracking their progress, and asking for support when needed. In this sense, empowerment is a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Ultimately, empowering patients through effective communication helps foster a sense of control, builds trust, and supports the development of a strong partnership between patients and healthcare providers, leading to improved health outcomes and a more patient-centered approach to care [5].

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, empowering patients through better health communication is essential for achieving better health outcomes, enhancing patient satisfaction, and promoting a more equitable healthcare system. Effective communication goes beyond the transmission of information it requires a commitment to listening, understanding, and addressing the unique needs of each patient. Healthcare providers must prioritize clear, simple language, active listening, cultural sensitivity, and the use of diverse communication methods to ensure that patients are fully informed and actively involved in their care. The integration of digital tools, along with an emphasis on shared decision-making and health literacy, further strengthens the patient's role in managing their health.

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## Acknowledgement

None.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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