

## Strategies to Support Patient Comprehension

A significant challenge in healthcare communication is ensuring that patients understand both verbal and written health information, including clinical explanations, recommendations, instructions, educational materials, and more.

Health information and services often are unfamiliar and confusing, and people of all ages, races, cultures, incomes, and educational levels struggle with health literacy and numeracy. Taking steps to support patient comprehension is a critical element of patient engagement and patient-centered care. The following checklist can help healthcare providers evaluate their current approaches for ensuring patient comprehension and identify potential gaps and opportunities for improvement.

	Yes	No
Do you provide verbal health information and instructions in lay language and use words that are well known to individuals without medical training (e.g., “shortness of breath” instead of “dyspnea,” and “dry mouth” instead of “xerostomia”)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If no common term exists for a medical or technical term, do you explain the term the first time you use it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patient forms and educational materials easy-to-read, and do they adhere to the principles of <a href="#">plain language</a> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is information presented in a simple, organized way? Is the most important information discussed first?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do discussions and written materials focus on what the patient needs to know and what they might want to know? Does information exclude extraneous details that could distract the patient and potentially inhibit understanding?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
When possible, and with the patient's permission, do you include the patient's family members and significant others in discussions about the patient's care?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you consider the patient's overall capacity to understand, language barriers, cultural beliefs, and disabilities as part of communication strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization have access to language services, interpreters, and assistive technologies to meet patients' diverse needs? Are patients made aware of these resources?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization's philosophy on informed consent reinforce the belief that patients must fully understand the information provided to be truly informed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the informed consent process tailored to each patient and does it include a clear explanation of risks, benefits, and alternative options?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use open-ended questions rather than closed-ended questions to facilitate more meaningful communication?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use a technique such as <a href="#">teach-back</a> or <a href="#">show-me</a> to gauge patient comprehension and reduce the risk of miscommunication?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you encourage patients to ask questions, and is ample time allotted for questions and review of materials during patient appointments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you provide follow-up instructions verbally and in writing to reinforce the information? Do you provide patients with updated written instructions if changes in their care plans occur?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When patients are nonadherent to treatment plans, do you consider and assess whether they might not understand information or have health literacy barriers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do providers and staff members at your organization receive training about health literacy barriers and techniques to improve communication and patient comprehension?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Resources

- [AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#) (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)
- [Communicating Effectively With Patients to Improve Quality and Safety](#) (MedPro Group)
- [Cultural and Linguistic Competency](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health)
- [Risk Management Strategies for Informed Consent](#) (MedPro Group)
- [Risk Q&A: Interpreters & Auxiliary Aids](#) (MedPro Group)
- [Risk Resources: Health Literacy and Cultural Competence](#) (MedPro Group)
- [Risk Tips: Communicating Effectively With Patients Who Have Limited English Proficiency](#) (MedPro Group)
- [The Crucial Soft Skill in Healthcare: Why Effective Communication Is Paramount to Patient Safety and High-Quality Care](#) (MedPro Group; CME/CDE On-Demand Webinar)

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