



Care Team Communication Skills

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Care planning and care coordination are essential parts of healthcare. Face-to-face and telephone communications have long been the primary means for communicating health information. New technological communications are emerging as a viable path for patient communications. Electronic mail and other forms of Internet communication should be used to enhance the crucial interpersonal relationships between care-receivers, caregivers, and healthcare professionals.

Communication is giving and receiving information. This exchange is vitally important between members of the Care Team. At the same time, issues of privacy, confidentiality, and security must be addressed. If we understand some fundamental elements of live communication and apply them to our work in the electronic age, perfecting daily communication skills is simplified and successful.

Here are a few basic communication tips:

- Stay focused on the present, your message and feelings, understanding one another and finding a solution.
- Listen carefully. Hear them and reflect back what they're saying so they know you've heard. Listen with all your senses.
- Try to see their point of view. Suspend judgment.
- Reflect back to the speaker your understanding of what has been said, and invite elaboration and clarification. Responding is an integral part of active listening and is especially important in situations involving conflict.
- Keep in mind that it's important to remain respectful of the other person, even if you don't like their actions.
- Choose the right medium for the message you want to communicate. Sometimes more than one medium is appropriate.
- Communication within the Care Team calls for clarifying goals, structuring responsibilities, and giving and receiving credible feedback in a timely fashion.
- Providing feedback on performance is a basic tenet of motivation.
- Electronically, put the most important information—the purpose of the email—in the first paragraph.
- Make sure to include any call to action you want, such as a phone call or follow-up appointment. Then, make sure you include your contact information, including your name, title, and phone numbers. Do this even with internal messages. Remember, the easier you make it for someone else to respond, the more likely they are to do so!
- Encourage patients to ask questions and be involved in the conversation during visits and to be proactive in their healthcare.
- Communication can also be hindered by the normal aging process, which may involve sensory loss, decline in memory, slower processing of information, lessening of power and influence over their own lives, retirement from work, and separation from family and friends.

- Simplifying information and communicating in a manner that can be easily understood is one of the best ways to ensure that your patients will follow your instructions. Writing is a more permanent form of communication than speaking and provides the opportunity for the patient to later review what you have said in a less stressful environment.
- Frequently summarize the most important points.

Communication is not an exact science; you will need to experiment and find which strategies work best for you and your Care Team. You will also need to remember that different patients have different communication needs, which may require different techniques.

About the Author and Me and My Caregivers

Me & My Caregivers, Inc. - www.meandmycaregivers.com was founded by Rebecca Sharp Colmer as a result of:

- *Being a writer and publisher of The Senior's Guide series of books.*
- *Years of working with Seniors in a help-capacity role.*
- *Long distance family caregiver for her parents and in-laws.*
- *Seeing the frustrations of many people in the role of caregiver.*

Rebecca realized there are two universal needs of all caregivers: more help and better communications between all interested parties.

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Posted on www.FamilyCaregiverNetwork.com, Jan-Feb 2012

File Name: ARTICLE_care_team.doc