The SHARE Approach

Using the Teach-Back Technique: A Reference Guide for Health Care Providers

Workshop Curriculum: Tool 6

The SHARE Approach is a 1-day training program developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to help health care professionals work with patients to make the best possible health care decisions. It supports shared decision making through the use of patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR).

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Teach-back—a useful technique

Every clinician wants to know the most effective way to communicate with patients and their families. It's the first step to helping someone with a health problem. With the teach-back technique, effective clinician-patient communication is assured because patients are asked to "teach back" what they have learned during their visit. Patients use their own words to explain what they need to know about their health, or what they need to do to get better.

Below are some other advantages of the technique:

- Helps your patients remember and understand more information[1,2]
- Raises patient satisfaction and helps patients feel more relaxed
- Helps you gain your patients' trust
- Is not time consuming to implement and can take as little as 1 to 2 minutes[3]

How to use the teach-back technique with your patients

Check off the strategies you will try.

What To Say[4]

- ☐ Explain things clearly using plain language and avoid using medical jargon and vague directions.
- ☐ Make sure your patients know your goal is to check how well you explained the health information—not to test their knowledge.
- ☐ Encourage your patients to use their own words, rather than copying you or others on your clinical team.
- ☐ Ask open-ended questions that start with "what" or "how" and avoid questions that result in "yes" or "no" answers.
- ☐ When appropriate, ask your patients to show you how to do something, such as how to check their blood pressure or use their inhaler.

How To Say It[4]

- ☐ Speak slowly and make eye contact.
- ☐ Allow your voice and facial expressions to show genuine interest.
- ☐ Use relaxed body language.

When To Use Teach-Back[4]

- ☐ Use teach-back whenever you explain an important concept—such as treatment options, participation in a clinical trial, weighing benefits and risk, or adherence to a treatment plan.
- ☐ Check for comprehension after main points and repeat these points throughout the visit.

Teach-back questions for shared decision making

Try these examples with your patients
"We talked about two treatment options today: watchful waiting and starting radiation in a few weeks. I want to make sure I explained each option clearly. Would you please tell me how you would explain watchful waiting to your family member?"
"I want to make sure I was clear about the pros and cons of taking this medicine. Could you tell me about the possible side effects of the medicine and how it could lower your chance of a heart attack?"
"I want to check how well I explained the treatment options, benefits, and possible harms outlined in this decision aid on osteoporosis. Please tell me, in your own words, about the options we discussed that could help lower your chance of breaking a bone."

If a patient does not understand

At times, teach-back may reveal that a patient does not understand what they need to know, or what they need to do.

Steps To Take

1. Say, "I must not have done a good job explaining. Let me try again."
2. Explain the health information a second time using a different approach. Create a simple drawing, show a model, or demonstrate the behavior (such as showing how to empty a Foley catheter urine bag).
3. Use teach-back again to check for comprehension.

Promote a teach-back environment

Besides asking questions, there are other ways to promote teach-back. You can create an atmosphere that invites your patients to take the lead in using it.

Try These Tips

- Give your patients the time and opportunity to talk to you.
- Make sure all the staff in your office are trained on the technique and are using teach-back correctly.
- Post signs that explain teach-back and encourage your patients to use it.

Help your patients to understand.

Teach-back allows you to see how well you explained or taught health information to your patients. Patients do not mind being asked about their understanding—according to a patient preferences and assessment study.[5]

Using teach-back with decision aids

Teach-back is especially important to use with decision aids, such as written materials, videos, and interactive tools. These aids help your patients learn about and evaluate their options so they can make informed choices. After you offer decision aids to your patients, be sure to follow up at the next visit. Use the teach-back technique to make sure your patients used and understood the decision aids.

Start slowly

Remember, adopting new behaviors can take a little time to master. Be patient with yourself. At first, start out slowly with one or two of your patients a day. Soon you will find teach-back is second nature for you.

Track your progress

It's a good idea to document your use of the teach-back technique to know how well you are using it.[4] For a tracking log, visit page 159 in the Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit (Pub. No. 10-0046-EF), from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), at http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/healthliteracytoolkit.pdf.

Learn more about using the teach-back technique

For tips on the teach-back technique, visit:

› http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/healthliteracytoolkit.pdf (page 28)

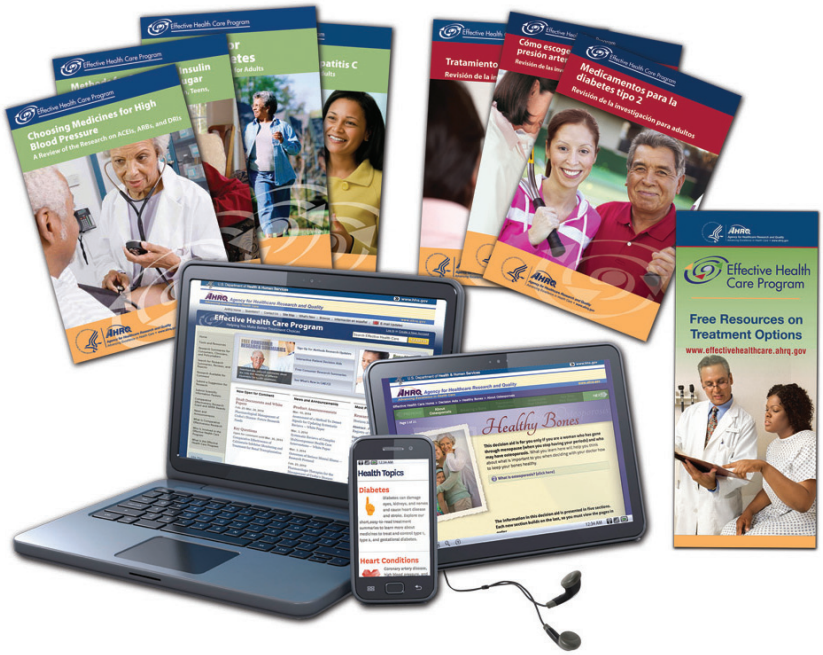
Learn more about resources for patients

For culturally appropriate interactive decision aids from AHRQ visit:

› http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/tools-and-resources/patient-decision-aids/

For consumer research summaries that compare treatment options for health conditions (some in both English and Spanish), visit:

› http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/research-summaries-for-consumers-clinicians-and-policymakers/



This tool is to be used in conjunction with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's SHARE Approach workshop. To learn more about the workshop, visit www.ahrq.gov/shareddecisionmaking.

References

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