

Use Health Education Material Effectively

Tool 12

Overview

Health materials are effective only when used as part of an overall patient education strategy. Simply handing patients a pamphlet or referring them to a Web site is not enough to promote understanding or behavior change.

Action

Don't assume that your patients read the materials you give them or direct them to.

- If the information is critical, make sure you or someone in your office reviews the information with your patient and/or the patient's caregiver.

When reviewing a handout:

- **Circle or highlight** the most important points as you talk about them.
- **Personalize** the material by adding the patient's name, medicines, and/or specific care instructions.
- **Use teach-back** to confirm understanding. See Tool 5: Use the Teach-Back Method.
- **Emphasize the importance** of the material by referring to it during followup phone calls, emails, and future office visits. You may need to give the material to the patient more than once.

Practice Experiences

An internal medicine practice developed and trained staff to review a one-page blood pressure educational tool with all patients with hypertension, chronic kidney disease, or diabetes. After using the tool for several weeks, the Health Literacy Team leader reported, "The staff seems to think it was pretty easy to use, easy to explain, and as far as I know, we've had a lot of patients say, 'Wow, thank you. I didn't even know what my BP should be or what a normal BP is.'"

Ensure patients know how to use audiovisual materials or access the Internet.

- If you give patients DVDs or refer them to Web sites, make sure that they have the appropriate video equipment, Internet access, and the know-how to view or access these materials. Like written materials, you can't assume that your patients will view audiovisual materials or visit Web sites you recommend. If the content is critical, be sure it gets communicated in person.
- Always have a conversation with patients after they view audiovisual materials. Decision aids and tutorials can save time but are a supplement to, not a substitute for, a discussion and checking understanding.

Train patients to use the patient portal and to be discerning consumers of Internet content.

- Even patients with excellent health literacy skills may have limited computer skills. To ensure that patients are able to access your patient portal, arrange training sessions to show patients how to get online and retrieve information from the portal. Use the Patient Portal Feedback Form to record how easy it is for patients to use your Patient Portal. See Tool 17: Get Patient Feedback for more information about using the form.
- If patients are surfing the Internet for medical information on their own, you may want to educate them on how to find accurate health information. You can refer them to this interactive tutorial from the National Library of Medicine.

Practice Experiences

In one family medicine practice, staff wore buttons saying “Ask Me About our Patient Portal.” This strategy helped them meet Meaningful Use (MU) objectives that encourage patients to use their patient portal.

Obtain patient feedback on materials.

- When following up with patients (see Tool 6: Follow Up with Patients), ask whether they found the materials helpful. This can allow you to emphasize the importance of the materials, review any questions patients may have, and obtain input from the patient about the materials provided. See Tool 17: Get Patient Feedback for more information about obtaining patient input.

Manage educational materials.

- **Monitor and organize any materials you distribute regularly** to ensure you know the type and amount of materials you have, can easily locate them, and know when you need to update or re-stock them.
- **Update your list of easy-to-understand materials available through your EHR and patient portal.** What is available may change rapidly. See Tool 11: Assess, Select, and Create Easy-to-Understand Materials for information about assessing and selecting easy-to-understand materials. If materials are accessed via hyperlinks, check frequently to confirm that the hyperlinks still work.
- **Create an information order set.** Providing clinically relevant information using EHR technology is an objective of the Meaningful Use EHR incentive program, but it’s not always easy to find the materials you want when needed. Have someone in your office assess electronically stored materials and identify the best ones, then create “information order sets” for commonly used materials. For example, you might create an order set of materials to give patients newly diagnosed with a chronic condition or who are starting a new treatment. Order sets can also be made available through the patient portal.
- **Ensure staff know** what educational materials are available, where they are located (both physically and in the EHR or patient portal), and how to use them effectively. Remind staff on a quarterly basis.

Track Your Progress

Record each time you've run out of materials and each time someone in the office can't find the materials they need. Every quarter, determine whether your system for managing your educational materials is performing better than in the prior quarter.

Periodically check in with staff and ask if they are using the materials and whether alternative materials are needed.

Have checkout staff look at materials that patients have been given. Record the percentage of materials that have been highlighted or personalized.

Some patient portals can report whether patients have viewed information provided through the portal. Find out what percentage of patients are using your portal and what components of the portal are being accessed.

If you field questions from the Health Literacy Patient Survey, calculate what percentage of patients responded "Always" to question #24.

If you use the Patient Portal Feedback Form, check whether patients answered "Yes" to question #7.