

Encourage Questions

An essential part of achieving improved health outcomes is to help consumers to understand the importance of their role in their own health care and encourage two-way communication. Some consumers are reluctant to ask questions. However, creating an environment that encourages consumers to ask questions gives them the confidence to take a more active role in their health care. When a consumer asks questions of the health professional/worker, it changes the dynamic of the consumer/health professional interaction. There are several strategies designed to change the dynamic of the consumer/health professional interaction. These strategies, when used over time, are aimed at teaching consumers to become more involved. Health professionals/workers can use questions to structure their communication with consumers.

Open-Ended Questions

Health professionals/workers can use open-ended questions to encourage/solicit questions from consumers. For example

- > What questions do you still have?
- > That was a lot of information. What do I need to go over again with you?

Avoid asking closed-ended questions such as 'Do you have any questions?' as this often leads to a quick 'no' even if they do have questions.

Besides verbally encouraging questions, it is important to invite questions using body language. For example

- > Sit at the same level as the consumer.
- > Look at the consumer when talking and listening, as opposed to looking at the computer or notes.
- > Be conscious about presenting yourself as having time and wanting to listen to their questions.

Ask Me 3

Ask Me 3 is a program designed by the National Consumer Safety Foundation. It encourages consumers to ask at least three questions during their interaction with a health professional/worker:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Consumers should be encouraged to ask their health professional/worker these three simple, but essential, questions in every health care interaction. Likewise, health professionals/workers should always encourage consumers to understand the answers to these three questions.

Studies show that people who understand health instructions make fewer mistakes when they take their medicine or prepare for a medical procedure. They may be able to better manage a chronic health condition.

These three questions can be included in patient information about your service, or separate written information can be prepared which spells out the questions that consumers can ask of their health professional/worker. Some health professionals/workers ask these questions of consumers at the end of consultations to structure Teach-Back method questions e.g. 'Now just to be sure I have explained everything to you clearly, can you tell me what your main problem is, what you need to do and why it is important for you to do this?'



Tool 6: Encourage Questions

Questions are the Answer

This on-line tool can assist consumers to build their own question list. Health professionals/workers can refer consumers to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality website <http://www.ahrq.gov/questions/qb/> or utilise these principles in any written/on-line information prepared for consumers.

An excerpt from the 'Questions are the Answer' section of the website for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality is:

Step 1: Choose the kind of appointment you need.

Why are you going to see your doctor? Select one of these options:

- > To talk about a health issue or matter
- > To get or change a medicine
- > To get medical tests
- > To talk about surgery

Step 2: To talk about a health problem.

If you have a health problem, you may have a lot of questions. Select the questions you want to remember to ask.

- > What is my diagnosis?
- > Will I need any more tests?
- > What are my treatment options?
- > How soon do I need to make a decision about treatment?
- > How much does this treatment cost?
- > Are there any side effects?
- > What happens if I choose to not have treatment?
- > What is the outlook for my future (prognosis)?
- > Will I need special help at home?

For more information

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