Healthcare Communication Toolkit

This Healthcare Communication Toolkit contains hundreds of ideas, techniques, and tools for healthcare professionals and managers to implement patient-centered process improvements concurrently with Patient’s VOICE Skill Clinics. These healthcare communication tools are brought together exclusively for users of Skill Clinics.

The goals of the Healthcare Communication Toolkit and all Skill Clinics are to increase:

- patient satisfaction
- quality of healthcare
- teamwork
- cost-effectiveness of healthcare
- patient health-promoting behaviors

Skill Clinics

Skill Clinics are one-hour workshops delivered by local leaders to all Healthcare Professionals (HPs). After practicing proven service and collaboration skills in each Skill Clinic, the HPs apply the skills as standards on the job and receive coaching by their managers.

Contact info@skillclinics.com for more information.
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9 trends in patient expectations

Healthcare is changing rapidly and patients are demanding:

1. **Improved access to care.** Patients are expecting faster, easier, and more varied means to access healthcare. Whether through the phone, online, or in-person, they expect greater speed and flexibility in appointments, transportation, fulfillment, response, information, treatment, and service.

2. **Portable medical record.** Patients expect to have a portable, electronic medical record so they and their healthcare professionals can access and provide input to their medical information anywhere—even remotely.

3. **Better-coordinated care.** Patients expect healthcare providers to coordinate their care with other providers and across different facilities to reduce tests, procedures, visits, and medical errors.

4. **Faster and better drugs.** Patients continue to expect new and better drugs to treat diseases and improve their lifestyle and quality of life.

5. **Personalized medicine.** Due to advances in genetic research, medical care is being even more customized to a person’s health, family history, and genes. Patients will expect greater customization, results, and fewer side effects.

6. **Improved customer service.** For hospitals, this means offering private rooms, more and better menu choices, customer service training, and technologies such bedside computers. For physicians in private practice, this means extended office hours and increased online services.

7. **More outpatient procedures.** The most frequent surgeries including hip and knee surgery, spine surgery, and biopsies continue to move to an ambulatory setting. Patients increasingly expect more surgeries to be done in an outpatient basis.

8. **More access to and communication with their doctor.** Patients continue to expect faster and more frequent communication with their healthcare professionals through email, the Internet, text messages, “tweets,” and cell phones.

9. **Improved ways to pay for care.** Given the millions of uninsured people in our country, many in healthcare, government, business and the general public believe our health care system is broken. In the future, patients will expect better, easier, and fairer ways to pay for healthcare.
The 12 fundamental patient rights

Patients have a basic set of rights that health providers should respect including:

1. **Considerate and respectful care.** All patients are entitled to consideration and respect from their health care providers.

2. **Be informed about their diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis.** Patients are entitled to receive information about their diagnosis, treatment and the outlook for their condition.

3. **Receive information needed to give informed consent.** Patients have the right to be told about the risks, side effects, and benefits of specific treatments and procedures to make an informed choice about whether or not to undergo them.

4. **Make decisions about their care.** Patients are entitled to make decisions about their plan of care and can refuse treatments — even when those treatments are recommended.

5. **Privacy.** Patients are guaranteed privacy about their health conditions, treatments, and medical records.

6. **Confidentiality.** Medical records are confidential and healthcare providers must keep patient health information protected.

7. **Receive emergency care.** Patients have the right to receive urgent and medically appropriate care at a hospital or other medical facility.

8. **Advance directive.** Patients are encouraged to create a set of instructions — known as an advance directive — that outlines how they want to be cared for in situations where they cannot communicate those wishes themselves. Patients can also designate a specific person or persons to make healthcare decisions on their behalf.

9. **Review their medical records.** Patients can ask for and review their own medical records and may ask to have them explained or interpreted if necessary.

10. **Be informed about a provider's business relationships.** Patients are entitled to ask whether their health providers have any business relationships that may influence their treatment and care.

11. **Agree or decline to participate in research studies.** Patients are not required to participate in research studies or experiments that affect treatment and care.

12. **Be informed of patient care policies and practices.** Patients are entitled to information about resources that help them resolve problems and complaints. They also have the right to be informed about what they will be charged and the payment options available.
14 ways to improve healthcare explanations

We can all make ourselves better understood by considering the perspective of the listener. To the patient, healthcare explanations can be very complex and difficult to absorb. Remember these pointers on how to improve the clarity of your explanations:

1. **Tell the patient how you will structure the explanation.** “Mr. Andrews, let’s cover your symptoms first, then we’ll discuss your treatment plan and follow-up care.”

2. **Allow enough time.** Don’t rush. Allow time for questions and concerns.

3. **Break information into manageable chunks.** Most medical information is challenging to absorb, so limit your discussion to two or three key points. Start with the most important information first.

4. **Give the reasons why, or rationale, for your explanations.** Most patients are more accepting if they understand both the “what” and the “why” behind an explanation.

5. **Account for stress.** Repeat and rephrase information as necessary.

6. **Check for understanding.** Ask patients to say what they understand about their condition and treatment.

7. **Use multiple forms of communication.** Ask the patient to take notes. Use health props, such as prescription labels or anatomical models. Use techniques and tools that include hearing, seeing, saying, touching and taking notes.

8. **Work with the patient’s literacy level.** Keep the explanation at about a sixth grade vocabulary level so that a greater percentage of patients will understand.

9. **Keep the conversation on track.** If the patient asks questions or gets sidetracked, redirect the discussion back to the topic under discussion.

10. **Give the patient a handout to take home.** Include the patient’s condition, care provided, what you’ve discussed, next steps, and your contact information.

**When discussing medical conditions and treatment plan:**

11. **Describe what the body is doing** and why the patient is experiencing their symptoms.

12. **Discuss lifestyle factors,** such as exercise or diet, which might contribute to or impact the patient’s condition.

13. **Ask if the patient is taking** any herbal supplements and over-the-counter medications.

14. **Discuss the pros and cons of treatment,** including the pros and cons of doing nothing at all.
10 ways to use PHRs to improve your patient interactions

PHRs can greatly improve the healthcare encounter, reduce costs, improve communication, and engage patients in their own healthcare. Here are 10 ways to integrate the PHR into the patient encounter.

In the healthcare environment

1. **Review patient information.** Use the PHR to check patient information, such as the dates of their previous appointments, previous tests, current medications and other health data.

2. **Arrange lab testing.** Schedule lab tests while the patient is still in the office.

3. **Send prescriptions electronically.** If your PHR is integrated with the patient’s pharmacy, use it to order prescriptions electronically. This can reduce the time between when the patient leaves the office and the pharmacy receives and begins preparing the prescription.

4. **Coordinate care.** Use the PHR to provide referrals and communicate with specialists, testing facilities, and other providers.

5. **Check for potential adverse drug reactions.** Use the PHR to ensure the patient is not prescribed medication that might cause an adverse reaction.

After the appointment

1. **Provide follow-up.** Check with patients to see if they need additional care or resources. Send reminders for lab tests and inform patients of their lab results.

2. **Schedule follow-up visits.** Use the PHR to schedule follow-up visits or send visit reminders to patients.

3. **Send wellness and health information.** The PHR is ideal for providing customized health information to patients with chronic conditions.

4. **Communicate with other providers.** Communicate with patient’s other providers (specialists, hospital-based providers) to check on test results or additional/ follow-up treatments.

5. **Improve payment and billing.** Use the information in the PHR to improve your billing processes. Communicate with insurers and confirm that your organization is billing patients correctly. Some PHRs/EMRs also allow patients to pay for their healthcare online.
8 ways to get patients to use and update their PHRs

PHRs need to be frequently updated to remain useful. A recent study found that many patients feel providers should be the ones to update and maintain the records. Here are 16 ways to motivate patients to use their PHRs as the helpful resource they can be.

1. **Make enrollment automatic.** Make enrollment automatic for all PHRs that are linked to the electronic medical record system (known as tethered PHR) or linked to a larger system’s EMR (such as those used by hospitals). One way to accomplish this is to enroll patients automatically when they call in for an appointment.

2. **Make it top of mind.** Post signs in the waiting room, display announcements on your website and offer pens or magnets with an “Update Your PHR” reminder and website url.

3. **Announce it on your phone system.** Play messages about the PHR on your phone system, so patients on hold hear a message about using the PHR.

4. **Provide a link on your website.** Put a dedicated link to the PHR on your practice or hospital website.

5. **Create screen saver reminders.** Create a screen saver that promotes the PHR or one that displays the PHR landing page. Make sure all of the computers in your office use the screen saver so that patients receive frequent reminders.

6. **Make them office-ready.** Provide computers in the waiting area so patients can update their PHRs on-site, and ask questions about their use.

7. **Promote the features patients want.** A study by University of Minnesota found that patients wanted PHRs that allowed them to:
   - Organize their health records, including medication reconciliation
   - Get online calendars and reminders
   - Get personalized health information
   - Access community services
   - Communicate electronically with providers and health plans
   - Manage health care costs

   Discuss the benefits of PHRs, such as information relevant to their specific health issues. Customize your discussions based on patient interests.

8. **Make it part of the appointment.** Ask patients if they have updated their PHRs when they check in. Lead patients to the computer area as they leave the exam room, and offer to help patients update their records.