

## THE ART OF CONVERSATION IN HEALTH CARE

BY TONISHA MELVIN

There are three things in life that many of us can't escape doing, which are reading, writing, and speaking in one form or another. When you are in training as a health care provider, you utilize all three of those skills, but one of the most important and difficult for some people to grasp is the art of conversation. For others, conversation may come naturally.

Everyone's communication style will be different based on your culture, race, or even your profession. For example, health care providers learn and adopt medical terms for standardized health care. Having a standard way of communicating is important for not only documentation, billing, and coding purposes but also for efficiency in care and patient safety. Health care providers spend years in school learning this vernacular, but what schools do not always do well is train providers on how to translate this terminology for patients' understanding. Medical jargon can seem like a foreign language to a layperson. But no matter your communication style, in health care the ability to communicate effectively is critical.

Some very important communication skills that can help bridge the divide are connecting, trusting, active listening, having compassion, speaking, writing, and, lastly, and educating.

Ensuring that you are connecting with patients means building a relationship with them so that they feel the care you are trying to convey.

Next, you want to gain the trust of your patient. Remaining transparent through every transaction will become invaluable in the provider-patient experience. Active listening will assist a provider in gaining trust, and lets patients know they are more than just another medical case. Having compassion will enhance your ability to listen actively and also assist in building your patient's trust.

Verbal and nonverbal communication are just as important as written communication. Body language and speaking clearly and effectively while maintaining eye contact with patients (and not the computer) will immensely improve the patient experience.

Patient satisfaction has been a long-standing challenge. Studies have shown that when patients are not satisfied with their experience, this could lead to loss of revenue, funding, reimbursements, and, in some cases, lawsuits. Health care settings can often be fast-paced, leaving room for errors. Using multiple ways to ensure effective communication, such as instant secure messaging and team-based huddles, will decrease the likelihood of poor communication, improve patient satisfaction, and foster a greater chance of the best patient outcomes.



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