5 Tips to Improve Patient Engagement in Practice

Why should you focus on patient engagement? Patients consistently cite engagement as an important measure of the provider-patient relationship. Patients want to be included in the decision-making process. Approximately one out of every four Americans have begun using online reviews to select their doctor, and this number is growing.1 Increasing patient engagement improves treatment outcomes and decreases health care costs.2 Moreover, doing so can increase patient satisfaction and improve provider ratings. Everybody wins.

1 Listen to Patients
   - Getting to know your patients is key to establishing trust needed for a successful treatment partnership.
   - Ask patients why they have come to see you and give them time to express their concerns.
   - Review patient surveys to identify themes. Are your patients saying you spoke at their level, are you rushing patients, are you answering questions? Identify any strengths and build on those, while addressing any weaknesses.
   - Communicate with your patients and their caregivers in their native language. This shows you are invested in patient success, and may identify nuances that cannot be articulated in a second language.

2 Develop Mutual Goals
   Identify the patients’ priorities and develop mutual care goals. Understand that patient preferences impact treatment. For example, a patient who is averse to administering injections will have better compliance with oral agents for multiple sclerosis therapy. By identifying what is important to the patient, treatment decisions can be reached mutually.

3 Take Advantage of Technology
   Studies show that increased compliance with therapy and follow-up appointments are priorities of patient engagement. There are many commercially available tools and apps to help patients remember to take medication and attend appointments. Incorporate these into your practice where possible. Additionally, many electronic health records (EHR) have features that allow patients to access education materials, shared decision-making tools, and after-visit summaries at times that are convenient to them. This allows patients to modulate information flow and avoid being overwhelmed during the clinic visit.

4 Educate Patients
   Educate patients and caregivers about disease processes and therapies in non-technical terms. When possible, provide written materials or online education resources for later review. Remember that patients may have a low literacy level and adapt accordingly. Ask for feedback and allow time for questions after your explanation to ensure understanding and to demonstrate to patients that they and their treatment plan are unique.

5 Provide Support
   Patients and caregivers benefit from advocacy opportunities and resources available from patient organizations. Support groups from organizations such as the Alzheimer’s Association, International Essential Tremor Foundation, and Epilepsy Foundation provide emotional support to patients and caregivers, supplement education, and information on research opportunities. Providers should incorporate these resources into the traditional care model of diagnosis and treatment. Where possible, providers should enlist support staff in these efforts to maximize clinic efficiency.

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