



Using Effective Teaching Techniques: How are nurses doing?

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Introduction

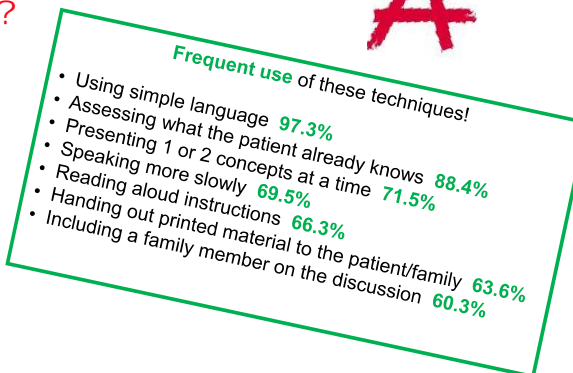
The prevalence of low health literacy is well recognized in the adult patient population of the United States. Many communication approaches thought to be best practice for mitigating the problem have been described in the literature. As the single largest group of healthcare professionals, registered nurses (RNs) interact most closely and most often with patients. It is critical that RNs know the value of the communication approaches and apply them when teaching patients in the healthcare setting.

This research surveyed a random sample of Texas RNs providing direct patient care for their self-reported frequency of use of best practices in patient education.

Results: What techniques do RNs use?

The survey results show a mixed report card for nurses' use of best practices for patient education.

A⁺

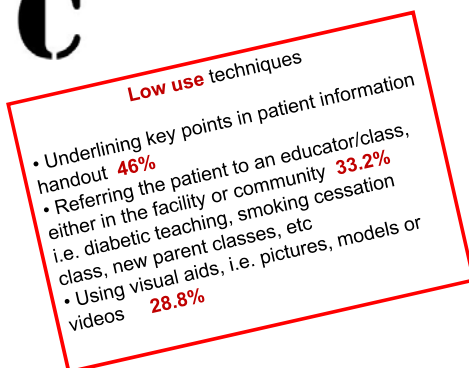


B⁺

Techniques used about **half the time**

- Asking the patient/family to repeat new information or provide a return demonstration of a new skill **57.7%**
- Following up in subsequent shifts or visits to confirm understanding **55.2%**
- Asking how they will follow the instructions at home **51%**
- Writing out instructions **51.4%**
- Asking the patient/family how they will follow the instructions at home **51%**

C



Best Practices in Teaching Patients: What techniques are recommended?

- ❖ Assessing what the patient already knows
- ❖ Including a family member in the teaching
- ❖ Presenting 1 or 2 concepts at a time
- ❖ Using simple language, avoiding medical terms or jargon
- ❖ Handing out printed materials
- ❖ Underlining key words in handouts
- ❖ Writing out instructions
- ❖ Reading aloud instructions
- ❖ Speaking more slowly
- ❖ Using visual aids, i.e. pictures, models, videos
- ❖ Asking the patient/family to repeat back new information or return demonstrate new skill, "teach back" method
- ❖ Following up in subsequent shifts or visits to confirm understanding
- ❖ Asking the patient/family how they will follow instructions at home
- ❖ Referring the patient/family to an educator or class in the facility or the community, i.e. diabetic education, smoking cessation class, new parent class, etc.

The Survey

The original survey was created and used by The American Medical Association (AMA) in 2007 to detail use of 14 best practices for patient communication.

The researcher received permission to use the AMA survey tool as a basis; and then modified the 14 best practices slightly (with expert input) to better reflect the nurses' role.

The survey population was RNs in direct patient care roles. A list of all RNs in Texas was obtained from the Board of Nurse Examiners in January 2009. (210,767 nurses)

Applying Inclusion criteria:

- Current active RN license
- Direct patient care role
 - Working full time
 - Living in Texas

Resulted in a target population of 91,618.

A random number generator was used to create 1000 random numbers between 1 and 91,618. Nurses at those numbered positions on the list became the sample population.

1000 surveys were mailed July 1, 2009. and 259 received by August 3, 2009
Return rate was 25.9%.

Conclusions

Registered Nurses in Texas are to be commended for the high frequency of use of many techniques that help patients better understand medical information.

However, it is troublesome that methods to determine patient understanding are not used with high frequency. This evaluation step is standard both in teaching/learning practice, and as part of the nursing process. Unless nurses ask the patient to repeat new information or follow up in some other manner, understanding and learning cannot be confirmed.

Nursing education efforts should focus on these best practices of teaching. Articles can be written for professional journals, videos of examples applying the techniques can be made, and continuing education classes can be offered to disseminate the information. Special emphasis should be put on the techniques used at a lower frequency, especially evaluation of the learner's understanding of material covered.

Further research is needed to study patient outcomes after instruction with the methods thought to be best practice, to assure effectiveness. Ascertaining barriers to high frequency use of the techniques would be helpful. Since the survey relied on self-reported use of teaching techniques, further research could verify use frequency via direct observation of patient/nurse interaction. Replication of the study in other states is advised.

References

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