

Tips for communicating clearly

Clear oral communication strategies help consumers feel more involved in their health care and increase their likelihood of accepting treatment recommendations. There should be an expectation that the consumer be an active participant in the communication process.

Consider areas / barriers of communication ie. non english speaking background, hearing impairment.

Key communication strategies:

- > **Warm greeting:** Greet consumers with a smile and a welcoming attitude.
- > **Eye contact:** Make appropriate eye contact throughout the interaction.
- > **Setting:** Ensure you are sitting at the same level without barriers (e.g. no desk) between you and the consumer.
- > **Encourage a support person to be present whenever possible:** This will enable the consumer to be more relaxed and will assist in greater uptake of information by the consumer and support person. Ensure you talk to the consumer, not just the support person.
- > **Use plain, non-medical language:** Use common words when speaking to consumers. Take note of what words they use to describe their illness and use them in your conversation. Another strategy to use in addition to listening to language that consumers commonly use is to refer to this website which has been developed by the USA Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. This resource is a plain language thesaurus for health communication and can give health professionals insight into lay terms.
http://depts.washington.edu/respcare/public/info/Plain_Language_Thesaurus_for_Health_Communications.pdf
- > **Slow down:** Speak clearly and at a moderate pace.
- > **Limit content:** Prioritise what needs to be discussed and limit information to 3-5 key points.
- > **Repeat key points:** Be specific and concrete in your conversation and repeat key points.
- > **Communication is a two-way process, encourage questions and consumer participation:** Encourage consumers to ask questions and be involved in the conversation during consultations and to be proactive in their health care.
- > **Appeal to different learning styles:** Consumers have different learning styles and it is important to appeal to these different styles to enhance effect of communication and learning.
 1. auditory learners
 2. visual learners
 3. kinesthetic learners or tactile learners.
- > **Utilise graphics, demonstrations, or audiovisuals to appeal to visual and tactile learners:** Draw pictures, use illustrations, demonstrate with 3-D models, demonstrate how to do a procedure, or show a DVD.
- > **Teach-back:** Confirm consumers understand what they need to know and do by asking them to teach-back directions. (Refer to Tool 4: The Teach-Back Method).
- > **Document:** It is important to document in the medical records/notes the key points discussed with the consumer and what the consumer understands.



Tool 3: Tips for communicating clearly

Respect culture and language requirements:

To work effectively with consumers from diverse backgrounds, you need some understanding of their cultural and language requirements.

Respect age and use people's titles as a matter of course.

Confirm with each consumer how he or she wishes to be addressed.

Insist on same-gender interpreters where possible

Do not use colloquialisms or jokes – they do not translate, and are hard for non-english speaking consumer to understand. Humour is culture based.

Explain the reason for your questions and procedures.

If there is a language barrier use an accredited interpreter (face-to-face or phone):

Brief the interpreter before the consultation.

Introduce yourself and the interpreter to the consumer.

Explain what the appointment / interview is about.

Explain to the consumer the interpreter's role.

Inform the consumer that the interpreter service is free.

Assure the consumer of the interpreter's professionalism and that confidentiality is respected.

Talk directly to the consumer, not the interpreter. Explain why certain questions are being asked.

Speak in the first person (I, you) not third (he, she).

Keep questions and sentences short, to allow adequate time for interpretation

Use plain English and avoid jargon. Not all words or phrases can be easily translated into other languages.

Rather than asking "Didn't you get your medicine?" ask "Did you get your medicine?" using simple, positive language.

If an interpreter is not available:

In the short term you can utilise Cue Cards to assist in basic communication. There are Cue Cards for 66 different languages/dialects on the website of Eastern Health, Victoria:

<http://www.easternhealth.org.au/services/cuecards/cards.aspx>

For more information

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