

The Teach-Back Method

One of the easiest ways to close the communication gap between health professional and consumer is to use the teach-back method. Asking what consumers recall and restate what they have been told is one of the top consumer safety practices.

Teach-back is a way to confirm what the consumer understands, using their own words. It is a method that creates an opportunity for communication in which the health professional gives information, and then asks the consumer to respond and confirm their understanding before adding any new information. The health professional can then re-phrase if a consumer is not able to repeat the information accurately. The health professional can then ask the consumer to teach-back the information again, using their own words, until they are comfortable the consumer really understands it. If the consumer still does not understand, the health professional needs to consider other strategies.

It is helpful to use written/visual material (including pamphlets, diagrams, models) to reinforce the teaching points as a way to improve consumer understanding and appeal to different learning styles (auditory, visual and tactile learners).

Examples of suggested approaches for health professionals to use for teach-back are:

“I want to be sure I explained everything clearly. Can you tell me how you are going to take this medicine?”

“We covered a lot today about your diabetes, and I want to make sure that I explained things clearly. So let’s review what we discussed. What are three things that will help you control your diabetes?”

“What are you going to do when you get home?”

It is recommended that the health professional document, in the medical records/notes, briefly what they have discussed with the consumer and what the consumer understands.

For more information

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