

Use of Recommended Communication Techniques by Maryland Dentists: Preliminary Findings

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Background

- Good dentist-patient communication may have a number of positive outcomes:
 - Decreased patient anxiety
 - Increased patient satisfaction, motivation & adherence to healthy behaviors
 - Better oral health outcomes
- Dentists' use of communication techniques to explain health information in language and ways their patients understand is critical to providing patient-centered dental care

Study Objectives

- Assess the number and type of recommended communication techniques used by Maryland dentists on a routine basis
- Assess dentists' perception of the effectiveness of each recommended communication technique

Methods

- 30-item survey
 - Communication items were adapted from Rozier et al. (2011)
- Mailed survey to a random sample of 1,562 Maryland general practice and pediatric dentists in 2010
- Follow-up to non-responders
 - Complete mailing (~3 weeks after initial mailing)
 - Post card (~3 weeks later)
- Requested the Executive Directors of the dental organizations send an e-mail to members urging them to respond to the survey

Survey

- 18 communication techniques
 - Includes 7 basic skills
- Rate the *use* of each technique
 - “During a typical work week, how often do you use the following communication techniques?”
 - ‘Always’, ‘Most of the Time’, ‘Occasionally’, ‘Rarely’ or ‘Never’
- Is it *effective*?
 - ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Don’t Know’

Survey

7 Basic Communication Skills

Interpersonal Communication

- Present 2-3 concepts at a time
- Ask patients whether they would like a family member or friend involved in the discussion
- Draw pictures or use printed illustrations
- Speak slowly
- Use simple language

Teach-back Method

- Ask patients to repeat information or instructions back to you
- Ask patients to tell you what they will do at home to follow instructions

Results

- Response rate = 37% (n=605)
 - 525 general practice dentists; 80 pediatric dentists
- Respondent characteristics
 - 93% Private Practice
 - 70% Male
 - 82% White; 3% African American; 15% Other

Results

Ask patients to repeat information or instructions back to you	
'Always' or 'Most of the Time'	19%
'Occasionally'	37%
'Rarely' or 'Never'	44%
Is it effective?	
'Yes'	48%
'Don't Know'	46%

Results

Ask patients to tell you what they will do at home to follow instructions

'Always' or 'Most of the Time'	37%
'Occasionally'	33%
'Rarely' or 'Never'	30%

Is it effective?

'Yes'	51%
'Don't Know'	43%

Results

Use of simple language	
'Always' or 'Most of the Time'	94%
'Occasionally'	5%
'Rarely' or 'Never'	1%
Is it effective?	
'Yes'	86%
'Don't Know'	14%

Results: Maryland vs. U.S.

	Maryland	U.S. *
Ask patients to repeat information or instructions back to you		
'Always' or 'Most of the Time'	19%	16%
'Occasionally'	37%	36%
'Rarely' or 'Never'	44%	48%
Ask patients to tell you what they will do at home to follow instructions		
'Always' or 'Most of the Time'	37%	23%
'Occasionally'	33%	32%
'Rarely' or 'Never'	30%	45%

*Source: Rozier RG, Horowitz AM, Podshun G. Dentists-patient communication techniques used in the United States: the results of a national survey . J Am Dent Assoc. 2011 May; 142(5):518-30.

Results

- 61% of dentists indicated they had taken a communications course other than that taught in dental school
- Dentists who had taken a communications course were more likely than those without such training to have assessed their practice for user friendliness ($p < .0001$)
- 50% of dentists indicated they would be interested in attending a Continuing Education course on communication skills

Conclusions

- Routine use of recommended communication techniques is low among Maryland dentists
- Professional training and continuing education courses need to include education and training in communication skills
- The dental profession and academia should lead efforts to develop, evaluate and disseminate communication guidelines for dental health professionals

Thank you

What questions do you have?

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