

First Rate Patient Care Part 2 – Breaking Down Three Critical Patient Connection Barriers

Communication, beyond simply great services, is likely the top way for an independent pharmacy to bust through patient connection barriers. But beyond going back to grad school to master health literacy, what are key methods we can use to ensure our communications truly connect with our patient populations?

We've got 3 methods you can use to break through critical patient connection barriers to ensure higher engagement, improve adherence, and better compliance. They're simple – and sometimes simplicity is truly better.



Overcoming Language Barriers

Your community is unique and diverse. There's no other community quite like it. And your community is likely diverse with many people who communicate through languages other than American English. In fact, [according to researchers, some 23 million Americans](#) today struggle with limited English-speaking skills. It's likely that some of these people are your pharmacy's customers.

If your patients don't speak the same languages as you or your team, this can create a unique set of challenges for ensuring their health literacy skill levels are met and they can participate fully in their therapy care plans with a fair chance at comprehension.

While it may sound elementary or ideal to tap a patient's family member who is fluent in their language, or even a team member who is multilingual, health care best practices caution against relying on them to break a language barrier. If a pharmacist or a pharmacy tech is fluent in a patient's language, you may be able to tap their expertise.



An alternative, to ensure accurate, medically-consistent translation, is to use a certified medical translation service that specializes in multiple languages and, just as important, medical terminology. Services such as these can help to protect the accuracy of your communications, boost adherence and compliance, and keep your patients feeling valued and comfortable. When patients understand their medications and why they are using them, they're more likely to stick to therapy. It's a win-win: for your resource budget and for the patient experience.

Those Embarrassing Health Issues Nobody Wants to Discuss

Let's face it. At some point in life, each of us will likely experience what we view as an embarrassing health issue. Hemorrhoids, erectile dysfunction, menopause symptoms, or even a simple rash in an undesirable region of the body. Many people feel embarrassed when discussing them. Even with a trusted pharmacist.

It's critical that you and your staff remembers this. Even more important: you don't want to leave a patient with a sensitive issue to languish in the counseling area. According to researchers, these patients may opt to high tail it to the nearest exit versus worry about a potentially embarrassing discussion. These patients need to experience a sense of privacy and trust.

In this instance, your tone of voice, body language, and skills in providing sensitive and appropriate counseling to these patients can make the difference between their adherence and compliance (and repeat business) or their desire to hit the "eject button."

In the counseling area, lean into the patient and speak softly so they'll lean in to engage with you. (This helps preserve a sense of privacy). Ask the patient to describe exactly how prescribers told them to take medications. This can help resolve any misunderstandings or concerns and identify any additional counseling needs or information needed in sensitive situations.

"Been There, Done That" Patients

Some patients are bonafide medical professionals. Others identify as experts, compliments of "Dr. Google" and other web-based medical advice media. They might decline a counseling session. They might even seem offended that you'd ask if they need one. But it's not your task to figure out if they are or are not experts in the medical field.



When in doubt, there are subtle strategies for breaking through the "been there, done that" barrier. Take a "there's an additional detail (or two) I want to tell you about this medication" approach and direct them to the counseling area. Most medications have at least a couple key counseling points you can discuss.

Often, the "been there, done that" patient may feel an "insider information" connection with you. They also may appreciate your concern and willingness to share information and you might open the discussion up to other therapy questions they may be unsure of.

Closing Thoughts

It's not unusual for patients to tap friends and family members to translate drug labels, read and comprehend medication information, or just follow label instructions. These practices may be adequate for the most basic levels of medication adherence. But they're also potential barriers to a patient's success in therapy management. But, when patients understand why they are taking their medications,

how to do so properly, and the consequences of inappropriate usage, they are more likely to achieve the best possible therapy outcomes. This is good for your pharmacy and great for your patients.

Set aside a little time for you and your team to identify which barriers occur on a regular basis, so that you will be ready to overcome them when they present themselves at your pharmacy's counter.

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