

## Outcomes of Patient Activation

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Although patients and doctors may bring different perspectives to healthcare, they usually share the goals of affecting a cure or, in the absence of that possibility, of establishing and maintaining the best possible state of health. In large part due to the advances in medical science and technology, there has been a high level of success with respect to the achievement of these goals. Some diseases, which previously held no hope of recovery, are now vulnerable to the interventions of physicians. Complete success remains elusive, however, and will probably continue to elude for a long time to come. There are many reasons for this -- some having to do with the uncertainties of life forces and others having to do with the dynamics of human interactions.

Just as medical scientists have engaged in research as a means of discovering more effective medical treatments, so too have they and social scientists engaged in research as a means of discovering more effective interactions between patients and doctors. To that end, a lot of patient activation studies have taken place over the last thirty-plus years. These studies have repeatedly shown that patients who play an active role in their healthcare by sharing in the decisionmaking process are more likely to stick to agreed-upon treatment plans, to be more satisfied with their care, and to have beneficial health outcomes.<sup>1-4</sup>

More notable among these was the early study, of over a thousand patients, conducted on behalf of the (then, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare) Secretary's Commission on Medical Malpractice. In their 1973 *Report*, the Commission found that patients:

...have a unique knowledge of their healthcare needs and the ways those needs should be met. Their participation in making the decisions which affect the delivery of health has the potential to improve the quality of healthcare and their satisfaction with the healthcare system.<sup>5</sup>

Nine years later, the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research took a concurring view of the need for patient participation when they defined an ethically valid consent as one that is:

...a process of shared decision-making based upon mutual respect and participation, not a ritual to be equated with reciting the contents of a form that details the risks of particular treatments.<sup>6</sup>

Today, in response to these types of findings, programs to increase physicians' understanding of, and skills in, communication are being made available to both medical students and practicing physicians; articles on communication needs appear more frequently in medical journals; and foundations are providing grant monies for communication research and education. Some of the organizations trying to help doctors improve the way they communicate with patients are now also directing their efforts towards patients. At the same time, publications such as *Redbook* and *USA Weekend*, are running articles that advise patients to take a more active role in their healthcare.<sup>7,8</sup> And patients are, increasingly, doing just that.

<sup>1</sup> K.M. Rost et al., "Change in Metabolic Control and Functional Status After Hospitalization: Impact of Patient Activation Intervention in Diabetic Patients," *Diabetes Care* 1991;14:881-9.

<sup>2</sup> M. Stewart et al., "Evidence on Patient-Doctor Communication," *Cancer Prevention Control* (1999): 325-30.

<sup>3</sup> M. Stewart et al., "The Impact of Patient-Centered Care on Patient Outcomes," *Journal of Family Practice* 49 (2000):796-804

<sup>4</sup> M. DiMatteo et al., "Relationship of Physicians' Nonverbal Communication Skill to Patient Satisfaction, Appointment Noncompliance, and Physician Workload," *Health Psychology* 5(6): 581-94 (1986).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Secretary's Commission, *Report of the Secretary's Commission* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1973), 79

<sup>6</sup> U.S. President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *Making Health Care Decisions: A Report on the Ethical and Legal Implications of Informed Consent in the Patient-Practitioner Relationship*, (Washington, D.C.:GPO, (1982): 2.

<sup>7</sup> D. Haupt, "Is the Doctor Wasting Your Time -- and Money?," *Redbook* 189(1):52 (1997).

<sup>8</sup> T. Mitchell, "Help Your Doctor Avoid Mistakes," *USA Weekend* (August 11-13, 2000): 4

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