
Teach-Back Process

Teach-back is a simple mechanism by which a patient's understanding of a concept or topic may be assessed.(Schillinger, Piette et al. 2003) Please refer to the figure below for a diagram of the process. You may wish to begin by informing the patient you wish to ensure that you (the health care provider) are certain you are doing a good job of teaching the patient and explaining the health care plans. Thus, you want the patient to "teach back" to you what he or she is supposed to know in order to check your ability to educate. It is the health care provider's responsibility, not the patient's, to communicate information in a clear and understandable manner.

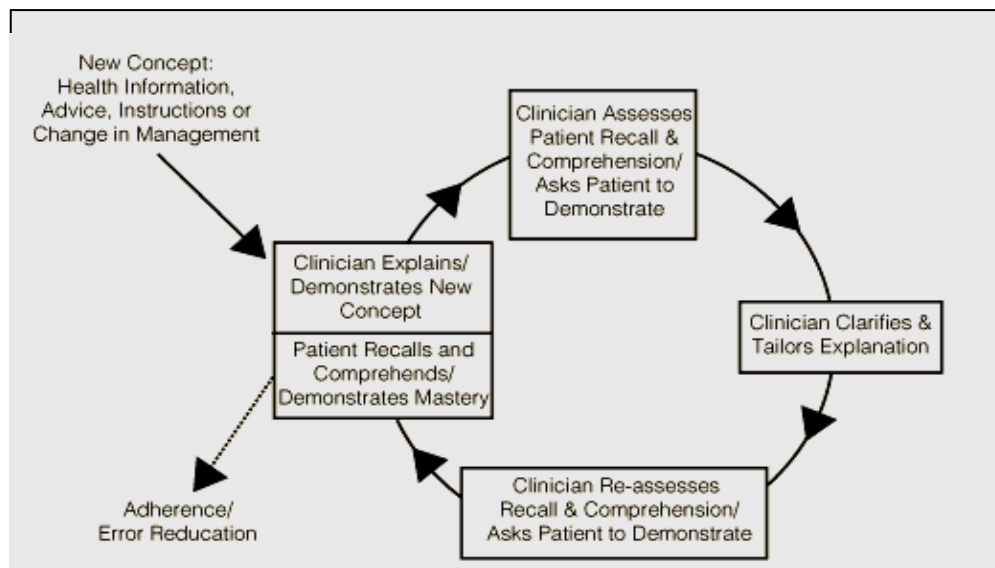
So, teach-back begins by asking the patient to explain his or her understanding of the issue at hand (eg, "Mr. Jones, what is your understanding of why you were in the hospital?"). This is in direct contradistinction to telling the patient the information and asking for yes/no confirmation of comprehension (eg, "Mr. Jones, you were in the hospital to treat your pneumonia. Do you understand?").

Once you have asked the open-ended question, attempting to assess the patient's understanding, give the patient time to explain his or her thoughts. This method helps you to identify areas of clarity and others of confusion or misunderstanding. You may then focus your educational efforts on any patient misunderstanding. It is an iterative process, that is, when you have clarified the misunderstandings or areas of confusion, you are encouraged to ask the patient again to explain his or her understanding of the information you provided in order to ensure mastery.

Throughout this process, be mindful of avoiding medical jargon and technical terms as well as aware of the educational level of your patient in choosing your nonmedical terms. Keeping your language simple without being patronizing, even for well-educated patients, will improve a patient's comprehension.

Of note, this model may be used to teach not only concepts but also techniques. For example, if you need to teach a patient with newly diagnosed diabetes how to inject insulin, this method will work as well. You may ask the patient to show you how he or she plans to prepare and inject the insulin. You can then address any errors in technique and ask the patient to again demonstrate, using the new knowledge you just imparted.

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- Step 1: Using simple lay language, explain the concept or demonstrate the process to the patient/caregiver. Technical terms should generally be avoided. If the patient/caregiver has limited English proficiency, a professional translator should be utilized to reduce miscommunication.
- Step 2: Ask the patient/caregiver to repeat in his or her own words how he or she understands the concept explained. If a process was demonstrated to the patient, ask the patient/caregiver to demonstrate it, independent of assistance, for the clinician.
- Step 3: Identify and correct misunderstandings of or incorrect procedures by the patient/caregiver.
- Step 4: Ask the patient/caregiver to demonstrate his or her understanding or procedural ability again to ensure the above-noted misunderstandings are now corrected.
- Step 5: Repeat Steps 4 and 5 until the clinician is convinced the comprehension of the patient/ caregiver about the concept or ability to perform the procedure accurately and safely is ensured.