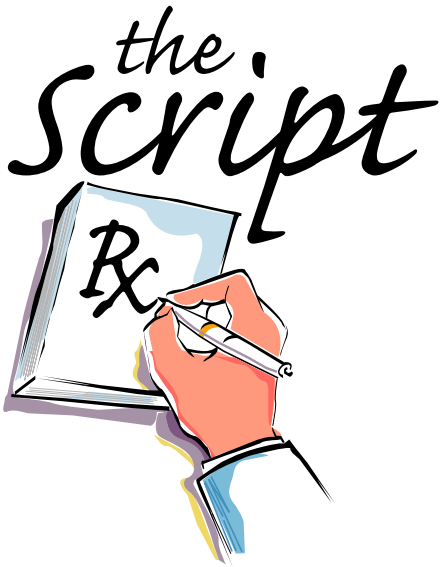

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Star Medical Professional Liability

Risk Management Newsletter

PLEASE READ AS DIRECTED

How do you know if your patient "gets it"?

As I was sitting in one my client's offices waiting for the manager, I saw a man and his dad trying to fill out the history form that the front desk staff member had given to them prior to their visit. One of the questions on the form must have asked "do you ever have any palpitations?" I heard the older man, perhaps the dad; say to his son, "what does palpitation mean"? The son said "I don't know, just put NO". For some reason I have always remembered that discussion in that cardiology office that day. That conversation could have taken place by any patient in any given office related to confusion over one of our "medical words". Time is precious on any given visit on any given day. We often look for ways that the patient can help fill out some of the history paperwork. Yet do they always "get it", meaning are we speaking/questioning them in a manner that they understand?

As they come into our offices for care, we want them to share information with us, we then assess them and the information and then we provide a plan/diagnosis attempting to achieve positive health outcomes. In order to properly assess and then create a goal/plan we must ensure that they are "with us" in the understanding of questions and goals planned. For compliance to occur they must understand "what is going on" in their language not ours.

As you look at potential problem areas in your office that may generate confusion over terminology lets review several areas where confusion may linger:

- The history taking form – any words not clear to the layperson?
- When drugs are dispensed or ordered - how is information shared related to ensuring the patient understands pertinent issues for the drugs usage, side effects and follow through with the office?
- When the patient is going for tests/labs or to see other physicians - do they understand the plan of care, are the words clear for them to move through the system?
- When you share educational information with them, how do you know they can grasp the information?

Take home tips to evaluate if your patient understands the questions and plans:

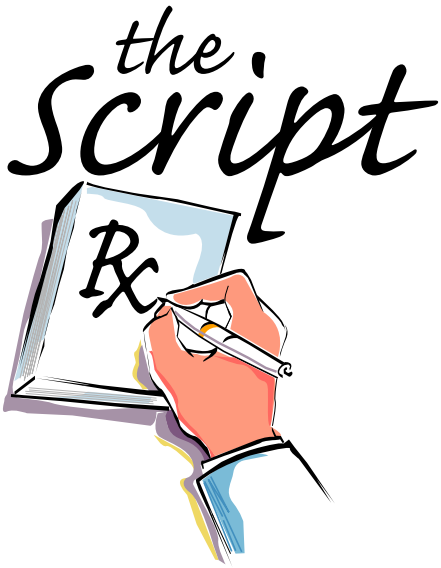
- Have them repeat back to you in their words some areas that might need review, such as with medication usage.
- Have them repeat back to you during consent in their words, what will transpire during a procedure.
- When you are ordering new medications or changing their medications, allow them to verbalize in their own words their understanding of how and when the drug will be taken.

As the title verbiage states does the patient "get it", that is a slang for – we all understand, right? Then I later wrote are the patients "with us" or on the "same page", these are all slang yet we tend to frequently use them. Just the same that the patient might hear/read the word palpitations yet not truly understand how it fits into their situation. The medical team members should attempt to find ways in which to help the patient further understand confusing language that might interfere with their goal attainment. Find the

Quote of the Day:

"**Integrity:** The highest courage is to dare to be yourself in the face of adversity. Choosing right over wrong, ethics over convenience, and truth over popularity...these are the choices that measure your life. Travel the path of integrity without looking back, for there is never a wrong time to do the right thing."

-Unknown



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time to allow them to share in their words what will happen and what they need to understand to help us heal them. Confusion can lead to errors, by taking the time to ensure that everyone is on the "same page", you will allow for a healthy environment in which to obtain and share information.

MEDICATION ISSUES: Are your patients safe with medications you order?

Following the recent scare with dog food contamination, another issue has come to the forefront as to the safety of our medications. Do we have systems in place to alert patients for a potential drug scare? Drug dispensing is a large part of our practice, look to provide ways to ensure education is supportive for both the patient and our needs.

When you provide samples to the patient, what information is shared with them to ensure they understand the role of the drug and its usage? Do you know if your patient is buying drugs across US borders or on the Internet? The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has a great website to educate both the medical staff and the patients regarding these questions. The FDA was formed as the first consumer protection agency; they look to provide systems that allow proof of the safety of drugs utilized in our country. Nowadays the patient has many options to obtain medications. Take the time to assess how your patient is obtaining medications and ensure they understand clinical usage. Once again, do they understand issues associated with each drug no matter where they purchase it?

Take home points regarding the safe dispensing and monitoring of medications:

- Take time to ensure that you have systems in place to deal with medication recall issues listed with FDA
- Does the patient know exactly how/when to take the drug
- Do they know what other drugs to avoid
- Do they know what side effects to monitor and report
- Is teaching and learning done in their own words
- Do they know how to utilize the FDA website for any problems with Internet buying, such as "12 medications not to buy online"
- Evaluate the FDA website, www.fda.gov for updates and MEDWATCH issues, look at the educational support for the voluntary reporting of adverse events, product quality problems and product use errors

The FDA is currently in the process of promulgating a new rule, Use of Medication Guides to Distribute Drug Risk Information, attempting to ensure that prescribers, patients, and their families have the information needed to support the safe and effective use of prescription medications. As seen with prompt reporting with the dog food scare, continue to educate yourself and the patient related to any adverse issues with medications. Encourage voluntary MEDWATCH reporting when appropriate. Allow the patient to understand the role and safety of the drug as it interfaces with their symptoms. Attempt to provide user friendly instructions encouraging better use of any needed drug.

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