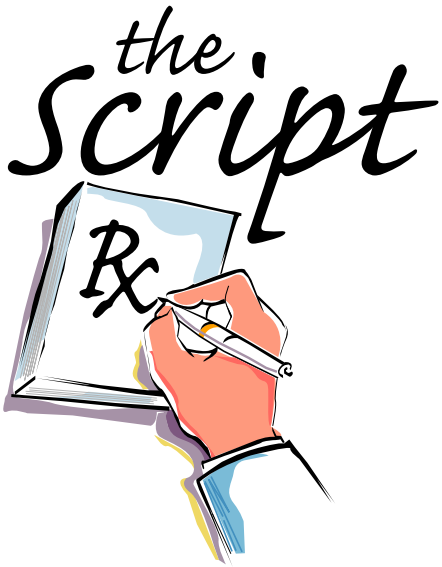

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Star Medical Professional Liability

Risk Management Newsletter

PLEASE READ AS DIRECTED

Looking for remedies to alleviate the "silent killer" of poor communications that may lie dormant in your organization?

As you work everyday in your busy office, you might not even be aware that your communication patterns may not be the most effective method for sharing information with your patients. As patients continue to be seen in your office they may be or become unhappy with your communication skills, yet they want to continue to utilize your services. They may stay for convenience reasons or they like your practice; yet feel your communication skills fall short of their expectations. Then one day an adverse/unanticipated event occurs and they may feel that everyone was too busy to listen or that no one cared about their issues. They may even seek retaliation which could mean contacting/reporting to an agency discussing your practices or they may seek legal counsel. When patients are silent this does not always mean that they are satisfied with your services; taking the time to evaluate their perception of your services will be time well spent. By taking a proactive approach in evaluating your communication patterns you can enhance the quality of your services and allow the healing to begin. Patients need to feel that you have the time and that you care about their welfare.

Often when we talk with an unsatisfied patient they are seeking answers; they feel the "silence" or lack of concern or just poor quality communication patterns. They often state that if only one person would have taken the time to listen or acted like they cared about their healthcare concerns, retaliation may not have been sought. They want to feel involved in their healthcare, while at the same time being part of the "loop" in the healing process.

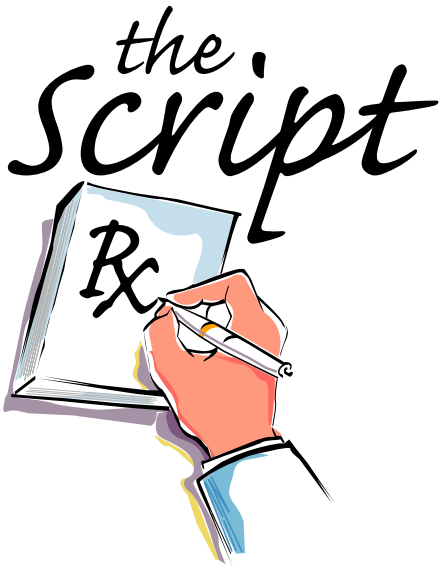
In this issue of our "Script" we will share with you healthy options to restore the wellness of the communication skills that support your organization. We often see that poor communication is the root cause of many situations needing review. The remedy may take a bit of time and restructure, yet the rewards will support a healthy patient/physician relationship.

We will begin by asking two questions: What does communication mean to you the office and practitioners? As you look to what you want for your organization we then turn to what does communication mean to the patient? Are the expectations the same or is there a "gap" or variance in what each group is seeking. Patients often become dissatisfied when outcomes are different than what they anticipated. The physician or office may state how events will occur, yet the outcome may not be what they anticipated. Problems often begin when this grey area surfaces and the patient does not know where to turn for answers. By reviewing where this "gap" may exist in your practice, you may start to cure problems that are lying silent.

Tip for the Day:

Validate patient identification with two sources, i.e. name and date of birth or medical record number when using the chart.

Evaluate your systems to ensure that you have a way to validate right patient-right chart. Take the time to perform a sound audit to ensure that staff members are performing some type of second patient identification when reviewing the chart or sharing information with others. All team members should partake in this activity to lessen the possibility of identification problems. Whether it is a clinical or administrative issue, by taking the extra minute to allow for a review of two identifiers you lessen the potential for problems that occur with misidentification.



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Risk Management Newsletter

As you return to your day to day operations, evaluate your communication patterns, continue to look for those "gaps" in your practice. Take the time to monitor the patient's perception of your services. Their input may be a valuable resource for implementing change. The team must work collaboratively to ensure that systems are in place that allow for the patient to receive a clear picture of expectations you want from them and what expectations they need from you for positive health outcomes. Any monitoring system that seeks to evaluate the health of your communication patterns will allow for healing and stronger relationships.

Remedies for communication ailments:

Ask for the patient's perception of your services or communication patterns

- Patient satisfaction surveys
- Informal phone calls to validate care provided
- Do they know whom to contact if they should have problems, do you have a brochure or website to aid them for ancillary staff support

Perform "walk around" audits monthly

- Listen to ensure that privacy is respected
- Are patient's problems or issues being addressed in a timely manner
- Are you, the manager, aware of problems that arise
- How much time is spent listening to the needs of the patient

Does the patient feel informed?

- Do you have parameters of what procedures need consent
- Is the physician involved with discussing risks and alternatives of the consent, allowing for questions from the patient, along with a plan of action

Does the patient understand the language or medical jargon when the physician/staff discusses lab/test results or the plan of care/goals?

- Do you have a teaching method to ensure the patient understands how information will be shared after a test
- Do you evaluate your patient's understanding of your teaching tools, how do you know that they understand

Is your phone communication effective for positive outcomes?

- Do you ensure that you are talking with the right patient, such as asking for two types of identification to validate information is being shared with the correct patient
- Does the patient have realistic expectations of when you will call them back

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