

Informed, Engaged, Involved: *The value of patient education*

presented by Understand.com

Patients have never had access to as much health information as they do today.

Yet many physicians still struggle with ensuring that their patients have the right information to guide them in their healthcare journey. Why? Because most of the publicly-available information is overwhelming, the jargon unfamiliar, and the advice either too general or too specific to be useful to individuals.

Make no mistake: patient education matters.

"A central plank of health care reform is an expanded role for educated consumers...", writes researcher Robert John Adams in the journal *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*.¹ "Most observers agree that this central role demands improved education and understanding...."

Well-informed patients are more engaged in their overall care and take a more active role in their recovery. They make better decisions. They feel more ownership of their healthcare. With less anxiety and more information, they have more trusting relationships with their healthcare providers.

Patient education has a direct impact on a patient's recovery.

Preventable complications are all too common following surgery or hospitalization. Adverse events, confusion over medication and failure to follow self-care instructions can slow a patient's recovery or worse.

Quality information affects patients in less tangible ways, too. Pre-surgery education can have a tremendous impact on a patient's sense of whether the surgery was successful. It gives physicians an opportunity to set expectations and opens the door to a frank discussion about the planned procedure. When patients know what to expect and feel prepared prior to surgery, they are more satisfied with the results of their surgery and report fewer problems.³



Their sense of overall well-being post-surgery improves across five key measures:

- purpose
- social
- financial
- community
- physical wellness⁴

Patient education upon hospital discharge reduces costly readmissions by 30 percent² and reduces adverse events, medication errors and emergency room visits.

As the American Medical Association says, **"patients stay healthier when they stay informed."**

¹Adams, R. J. (2010). Improving health outcomes with better patient understanding and education. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, 3, 61–72.

²Jack, B.W. (2009) A reengineered hospital discharge program to decrease rehospitalization: a randomized trial. *Annals of Internal Medicine*; 150(3):178-87.

³Mike Ellrich and Daniela Yu (2015) The Benefits of Pre-Surgery Education. *Gallup Business Journal*.

⁴Mike Ellrich and Daniela Yu (2015) The Benefits of Pre-Surgery Education. *Gallup Business Journal*.

⁵<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/patient-health-resources>

**Interestingly,
patient education
not only improves
patient satisfaction
– it improves staff
satisfaction
as well.⁶**

Nurses, who often play a central role in educating patients, can derive great satisfaction from this part of their role.

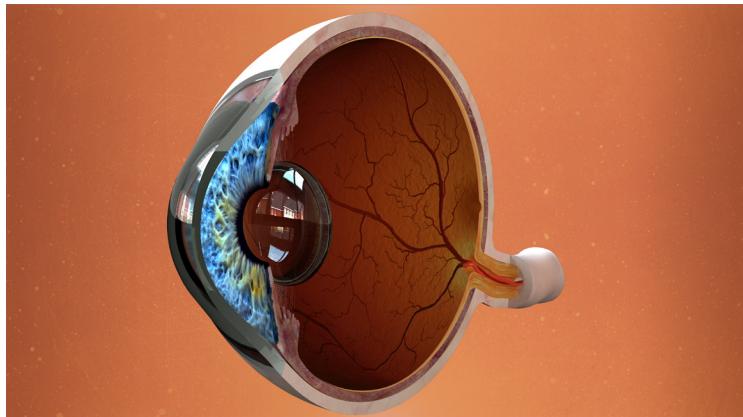
The quality and design of patient education materials is central to their effectiveness. In patient education as in so many aspects of modern life, lower socio-economic status can be a barrier.⁷ This goes hand-in-hand with literacy levels; research confirms that patient education programs are more effective among populations with overall higher health literacy levels.⁸



For that reason, it's important to provide patient education materials in a range of formats, including audio or video for the alarmingly high number of people who struggle with the written word. Use plain language,

lots of visuals, and consider providing translations if that will help the population that you serve.

One of the biggest hurdles in educating patients is that people have difficulty accurately remembering what they hear in doctors' offices, particularly in stressful circumstances.



Surgeons can be intimidating.

Patients who are facing a frightening diagnosis or recovering from a serious accident can have difficulty understanding and retaining new information. A friend or family member should attend consultations, listen and take notes. Patient education materials should be made available in a form that patients can take home and read or watch later. Staff should call a day or two later to see probe for questions and concerns.

Finally, it is worth remembering that communication is a two-way street. Active listening will help you gauge whether your patients have understood the material you provided, and will encourage them to come to you with questions and concerns of their own.

Physicians should take the lead on educating their patients, lest Dr. Google take on the role with unpredictable consequences.

The result will be better outcomes and healthier, more satisfied patients.

⁶Abbott SA (1998). The benefits of patient education. *Gastroenterology Nursing*; 21(5):207-9. Review.

⁷Adams, R. J. (2010). Improving health outcomes with better patient understanding and education. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, 3, 61-72.

⁸Adams, R. J. (2010). Improving health outcomes with better patient understanding and education. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, 3, 61-72.