



Patient education

Sharing a passion, sharing resources

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I have read that physicians often do not ask patients to describe their understanding of their own diagnoses. I have tried to do this over the years. I once asked a patient what he knew about his hypertension. The response surprised me—he thought his “pertension levels [were] too high.” This is why asking is so important and why patient education is integral to family medicine.

I have been teaching about patient education for more than 20 years. It has been a passion since I started medical school and is still a source of fun and reward in my practice and teaching. It was not taught when I was in medical school, and I doubt it is taught now. Yet, physicians have an important role in patient education. And with increasing emphasis on patient self-management and self-care, I bet that this role will become even more important.

The Latin word for *doctor* is *docere*, which means to *teach*. To achieve shared decision making, improve understanding and adherence, motivate, and encourage self-management, we have to be effective patient educators and work well with other health providers who share this role. The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) is stepping up to help family physicians and their teams deliver better patient education, led by a new CFPC Patient Education Committee chaired by Dr Mike Evans from the University of Toronto in Ontario, and with representation by experienced clinicians, a recent graduate, and researchers. There are going to be exciting resources for family physicians and our patients coming from this committee in the future. The College is committed to improving value for membership—this is one way we can help provide support to family physicians in the day-to-day provision of care and enhance our services for Canadians.

Twenty years ago, patient education was not seen as much more than handing out pamphlets in the office. Many of us can recall the outdated, disorganized racks and stacks of materials we tried to keep handy. Times changed, and “Dr Google” vastly enhanced patients’ ability to access medical information. This led to occasional visits from patients with the dreaded reams of pages from the Internet, which choked up our schedules as patients self-diagnosed and self-educated from sites that were neither credible nor reliable. Times are changing again. Social marketing and new technologies are rapidly changing how we can interact with patients—e-mail, Twitter, blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts, webinars,

and YouTube. Recently the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation became my “friend” through Facebook.

We can introduce patient education strategies in our reception areas, in our examination rooms, and on practice websites. There are also emerging opportunities, trends, programs, and technologies that will assist us in meeting our patients’ education needs. Patients have high expectations and appreciate the health education they receive from their family doctors, who are seen as trusted, credible sources of information, coaches, and facilitators.

The Patient Education Committee will update existing and create additional online pamphlets. This section of the College website is one of the most active—clearly there is a demand for this type of information. We will strive to provide information that reflects best evidence and Canadian content—and this is only a small component of the College’s overall patient education strategy.

Other resources on patient education can be found on **CFPlus**.^{*} This includes a list of useful websites. Bookmark these sites on your office computers; they can provide valuable references when counseling patients in the office or when recommending sites for patients to review later, and they can assist your office staff in their patient education efforts. Also available on **CFPlus** is a website evaluation form, designed to help structure evaluation of sites for recommendation to patients, and a template of a website prescription, which you can download, copy, and use with your patients. The prescription allows you to “prescribe” a specific website or check off appropriate sites from a list of top sites, helping your patients access accurate, up-to-date information on the Internet and making it easy for you to direct patients to this information.

Patient education is not just information-sharing, and websites are not a panacea. Physicians are not alone in educating patients, but we should provide leadership in this area of practice and the CFPC should provide top-notch resources. The College has made a commitment to providing more patient education programs, tools, and materials, and we are off to a good start. I hope you find educating your patients as much fun as I have. 🍁



^{*}The patient education resources are available at www.cfp.ca. Go to the full text of the article online, then click on **CFPlus** in the menu at the top right of the page.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 722.