Everyday Teaching in the Emergency Department
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- This talk will discuss ways in which we can improve how we communicate and teach our patients in order to better educate them on their medical care in the emergency department. It will focus somewhat on issues of literacy and the discharge process, including discharge instructions, but is applicable to all patients and to the entire emergency department visit.

- Literacy
  - A literacy performance level of “basic literacy” indicates someone who has the skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities. This definition comes from the Institute of Education Science’s National Center for Education Statistics and is used by the government to assess literacy. Examples of tasks typical of this level including finding in a pamphlet for prospective jurors an explanation of how people were selected for the jury pool, using a television guide to find out what programs are on at a specific time, and comparing the ticket prices for two events.
  - Those who perform at the “below basic” literacy level have no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills. Examples of tasks typical of this level include searching a short, simple text to find out what a patient is allowed to drink before a medical test, signing a form, and adding the amounts on a bank deposit list.
    - In Michigan, 8% of the adult population is at the “below basic” level. Michigan is actually a “good” state with one of the lowest “below basic” literacy levels in the country. North Dakota, Minnesota and New Hampshire are the lowest in the country at 6%; California is the highest at 23%. Those that are non-English speaking and therefore unable to take the assessment are included in the “below basic” level.
  - While literacy is clearly an issue, it is important to note that everyone, no matter what their level of education, can misunderstand health information, particularly if the issue is emotionally charged or complex.

- Tips to help better educate our patients
  - Teach in small increments, pausing frequently so that the patient can ask questions. This also allows time for the patient to absorb what was just said.
  - Remove any extraneous information. Taking away distractions allows patients to focus on the important, relevant information.
  - Try the teach-back method! As the name implies, this method involves teaching the patient about their medical condition, how to take their medication, when to return to the ED, when to follow-up, etc, then asking the patient to teach the concept back to show that they understand what was taught.
  - Use the patient’s terminology and avoid using medical jargon. If you must use medical jargon, make sure to explain the jargon in layman’s terms.
- Pictures can be very helpful. If the patient has a condition that would be best explained with a picture (ex. nephrolithiasis), drawing a picture or printing a relevant picture can be very useful.

- **Pitfalls**
  - Remember that if you ask a patient “Do you understand?”, they may say “yes” even if they do not understand.
  - Remember that patients with low literacy do not just have trouble reading; they also often have difficulty comprehending topics, organizing thoughts and perceptions, and problem solving.

**References:**