



Research Summary

on Communication Practices for Collaboration

RESEARCHERS at Case Western Reserve University conducted a review of the literature on communication practices between health care providers and parents.¹ A total of 15 studies examined the relationship between parent-provider communication and health care outcomes; eight additional studies examined the effects of strategies designed to improve communication between parents and providers.² Here is what the researchers learned from their review of these studies.

How were the communication practices defined and implemented?

Communication practices were defined and implemented differently across all of the studies in this review. A single, agreed-upon definition or list of effective communication practices did not exist in this literature. However, some of the most widely mentioned communication practices across studies involved providers listening in ways that demonstrated interest, attention, empathy, and support; reflecting others' feelings or concerns; and sharing information that parents perceived as relevant and useful.

What were the characteristics of the participants and settings in the research on communication practices?

The communications between health care providers and parents all took place in health care clinics or hospitals that served pediatric patients ranging in age from infancy to 14 years of age. The children were under the care of a pediatrician or health care provider for a variety of reasons including well-child visits and sick-child examinations and treatment. Some of the children also had diagnosed developmental delays or disabilities.

What factors were associated with improved communication practices and positive outcomes related to these practices?

The review found that the following factors in at least some studies were associated with improved communication between parents and health care providers: sharing information in multiple ways (e.g., restating information, asking parents to repeat information, providing both written and verbal forms of information); requesting that parents share information prior to or during a meeting (e.g., completing a checklist); and involving children and parents in mutual problem-solving. The review also found that the use of effective communication led to the following positive outcomes: increased parental satisfaction with health care services (in the majority of studies) and improved

adherence to providers' recommendations and a greater likelihood that parents would disclose children's problem behaviors (in a few studies).

Bottom line

Research on parent-provider communication in health care settings has shown that certain practices such as listening to parents and sharing information with them in ways that demonstrate empathy and support can lead to increased parental satisfaction with health care services and possibly better compliance with treatment recommendations.

¹Nobile, C., & Drotar, D. (2003). Research on the quality of parent-provider communication in pediatric care: Implications and recommendations. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 24*, 279-290.

²These studies used a correlational research design. This means that the findings can inform us about factors that may be related to communication practices, but provide little evidence about which specific practices work best, for whom, and under what conditions.