

2004
CASE STUDY



BAYER INSTITUTE FOR
HEALTH CARE COMMUNICATION

PROGRAM
PARTNER
AWARD

In recognition of its outstanding commitment to improving clinician-patient communication during the past 16 years, **COPIC Insurance Company** of Denver, Colorado, has received the **Bayer Institute for Health Care Communication Program Partner Award** for 2004.

Under the aegis of Drs. George Thomasson, Richard E. Quinn, Jr., Alan Lembitz, and other COPIC officers and staff, the company has consistently championed improved clinician-patient communication.

- COPIC was among a handful of organizations that sponsored participants in the Institute's first faculty course in 1990. They have been offering Institute and other workshops ever since. During the past 14 years, COPIC has facilitated over 400 workshops training over 5,000 participants in the elements of good communication practice.
- In addition to defraying the costs of the workshops, the company has granted approximately \$1.5 million to participants in the form of discounts on their insurance premiums following their completion of the training programs.
- Conceptualized by former chairman K. Mason Howard, M.D. and evolving under the leadership of current chairman Jerome M. Buckley, M.D., COPIC developed and launched an innovative 3Rs Program (Recognize, Respond, Resolve) aimed at supporting doctor-patient interaction following unanticipated outcomes. Today over 1,000 physicians are participating in the program.
- COPIC worked with Colorado's Rep. Debbie Stafford, Speaker of the House Lola Spradley, and Sen. Steve Johnson in support of "I'm Sorry" legislation that permits health care providers and their employees to express regret to patients and their families over unanticipated outcomes without fear that such expression will be used against them in a legal proceeding. The legislation was signed into law on April 17, 2003.
- Through its bi-monthly *Copiscope* newsletter and other publications, COPIC regularly communicates with its insured physicians on the subjects of communication training, risk management, and other topics affecting clinician-patient relationships and quality of care.

DISCLOSING UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES AND ERRORS

Dr. Frederic W. Platt is Regional Consultant for the Bayer Institute for Health Care Communication as well as Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. In their **Field Guide to the Difficult Patient Interview**, Dr. Platt and Dr. Geoffrey H. Gordon write:

To keep a medical system functioning at a high level, we have to have open discussion of all errors, unanticipated outcomes, and near misses. We have to acknowledge errors before we can correct them. A shame and blame culture makes such acknowledgement and correction difficult or even impossible. . . .

When errors have occurred, patients seem to want their clinicians to . . .

1. **Admit the error** and be honest in describing it and discussing its implications. Patients and their families desire and deserve full disclosure of errors.
2. **Apologize.** Our patients want us to take responsibility for the error when it is ours. "I'm really sorry" goes a long way toward assuaging the anger [of the patient and family].
3. **Give evidence** that you are taking steps to repair the system that allowed such error to take place.

Source: Platt, Frederic W. and Gordon, Geoffrey H., *Field Guide to the Difficult Patient Interview*, 2nd edition, pp. 271–273. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2004. © 2004 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

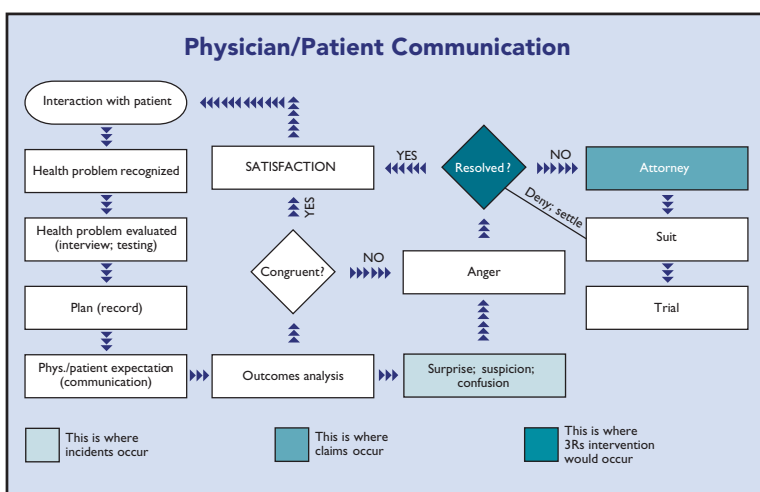
“Above all,” Dr. Platt adds, “patients want to be heard and understood. They want the physician to know what they have been through and how they have suffered. An empathic response by the physician is paramount.”

ABOUT COPIC

Founded in 1981 as a self-insurance trust, COPIC Insurance Company was incorporated as a fully-licensed and regulated professional liability writer in 1984. Today the company, headquartered in Denver, is Colorado’s largest medical malpractice insurer, insuring over 5,700 physicians in Colorado, representing approximately 80% of those who require private malpractice insurance.

COPIC also insures Colorado hospitals, health plans, and other medical entities, and offers physician and hospital coverage in Nebraska, where the company was named the state’s endorsed carrier by the Nebraska Medical Association in 2002 and insures over 600 physicians.

The company’s “A (Excellent)” rating was affirmed in August 2004 by A.M. Best Company. A subsidiary of The COPIC Trust, COPIC Insurance Company is directed by physicians, prices its coverage on a break-even basis, and returns favorable loss development to policyholders in the form of distributions; distributions to date total more than \$98 million.



3Rs Intervention in Physician/Patient Communication. Source: *COPIC Topics* 62, June 1999.

ABOUT THE BAYER INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH CARE COMMUNICATION

The Bayer Institute for Health Care Communication was organized in 1987 to enhance the quality of health care by improving communication between clinician and patient. Nationally accredited, the Institute has partnered with hundreds of health care organizations throughout North America. The Institute's flagship workshop, Clinician-Patient Communication to Enhance Health Outcomes, has trained more than 100,000 clinicians in the "4Es" of communication (Engage, Empathize, Educate, Enlist).

ABOUT THE PROGRAM PARTNER AWARD

The Institute launched its Program Partner Award in 1999. The award recognizes partners who have made an extraordinary effort to address the issue of clinician-patient communication within their organizations. Recipients of the award include:

- 1999 Veterans Health Administration–Department of Veterans Affairs
- 2000 Permanente Medical Group
- 2001 Geisinger Health System
- 2002 Physicians' Reciprocal Insurers
- 2003 American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
- 2004 COPIC Insurance Company



Dedicated to improving communication
between clinicians and patients.