

Communication Matters

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Thank you for joining our brief exploration of SUSTAINABILITY. Healthcare providers all grapple with it. We are pleased to report that many IHC partner organizations have developed creative responses to the challenges of maintaining the great efforts around enhancing communication skills. We highlight a couple of those efforts in this issue. We look forward to learning about ways that YOU have found to sustain skill development efforts.

Warmly,

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SUSTAINABILITY! The word is so widely used as to teeter at the edge of over-use. Energy use and agricultural practices and forestry management and economic development and fisheries, and so many other things aspire to sustainability. True sustainability may be honored more in the breach than in the observance, however sound an idea or innovation. An enduring feature of human nature is how our attention is captured by the latest sparkly flash in the pan. Innovations in healthcare, as in every other human endeavor, face significant challenges to sustainability.

There are particular benefits and challenges associated with how sustainable—or ephemeral—healthcare communication skill enhancements are. One reason for this is that standards for communication practices (which may or may not be addressed explicitly by healthcare provider organizations) are closely bound with an organization's culture. And culture is notoriously difficult to change. Culture is expressed in so many ways, and communication is one of the most fundamental. Where healthcare providers commit to changing the way they communicate with patients and families and with one another, a profound shift can occur. The proviso: Communication skills enhancements cannot be the entirety of the effort.

It is hard to imagine meaningful and enduring changes in provider-patient communication in an organizational culture that does not value those changes. Conversely, there are many possible ways that provider organizations can support lasting and positive developments in communication.

In our travels, we are privileged to work with a wide range of organizations, and to learn from their experiences. We are pleased to increase our role as a **clearinghouse for ideas for sustaining communication skills development**. Indeed, the impetus for new curricula, supportive teaching aids and new approaches has come from our clients. We are pleased to share and discuss a couple of intriguing innovations that help to support sustainable communication skills enhancements.



Oakland, Cal.-based Asian Health Services (AHS), a safety net community health center, saw great value—and measurable improvements in patient and staff satisfaction following implementation of C.A.R.E. ([Treating Patient with C.A.R.E.](#)) training. As a way to make sustained communication skills development a reality in a fun way, staff suggested, and AHS clinical leaders agreed, declaring "**C.A.R.E. Mondays**". Staff designed special **polo shirts** that they wear every Monday. "C.A.R.E. Mondays" stimulate conversations with patients about the core goals of effective communication, and instill pride in staff.

A further innovation at AHS involves evaluating specific **communication skills as part of employees' regular performance reviews**. IHC's training program provided the vocabulary and a feedback process for talking about communication skills in a specific and actionable way.



Saint Francis Hospital, Tulsa, Okla., started with fundamental communication skills training among its employed hospitalist physicians. IHC's [Clinician-Patient Communication to Enhance Health Outcomes](#) (CPC) workshop provided essential vocabulary and skills. Saint

Francis built its internal training capacity to provide clinician shadowing and coaching, based on an improved encounter protocol. The elements are **specific behaviors**: a friendly greeting and expressions of respect at the start of each visit, specific behaviors to engage and empathize with the patient during the visit, and appropriate closure. **Physicians seek out shadowing and coaching**, and have come to view it as a valuable service the hospital offers.

A **concise teaching aid** outlines the elements of an "excellent encounter." It is a useful adjunct to the shadowing and coaching program, and, reportedly, well-regarded by physicians, who helped to develop the tool.

These are just a small sampling of innovations to which we have been privileged to contribute. There is no "one size fits all" approach to organizational change generally and communication skills development specifically. We recognize—and celebrate!—the diversity of approaches by partner organizations, and we look forward to sharing more of these with wider audiences (with organizations' permission, of course!)



We have developed a new [process for partner organizations to share their innovations](#) with IHC and other affiliated organizations, and seek permission to base their own supportive materials on copyrighted IHC materials.

Upcoming clinician coaching course



Fulfill your commitment to sustainability

through clinician coaching. IHC's 2.5-day intensive coaching program, [Coaching Clinicians for Enhanced Performance](#), is an ideal way to sustain and build on enhanced communication skills among individual clinicians and for organizations as a whole.



Next session: **June 2-4, 2015, Columbus, Ohio**. Application and program agenda available [online](#).

Contact us at info@healthcarecomm.org to learn about communication skills training programs that will meet your needs. Upcoming courses are listed on the IHC [website](#).

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