



IHC Patient-Centered Communication Series:

Strangers in Crisis: Communication for Emergency Department and Hospital-Based Clinicians

Workshop

Overview

Patients who receive care at emergency departments and hospitals are frequently in crisis. Many present with trauma, serious illness, injury or complex or ambiguous health concerns. Emergency department (ED), hospital and urgent care center staff members typically do not know the patients; they are strangers who in an instant become responsible for the patients' care. Emergency department and in-patient hospital encounters can be fraught with intensity. Also, pressures that are common throughout health services may be magnified in the ED: time and resource constraints, high information processing needs, and high patient volume.

For patients and their family members, healthcare settings in general and hospitals and the ED in particular can be chaotic and frightening places. In addition to the stresses of their medical issues, patients may be uncomfortable with the unfamiliar setting. In the ED the imperatives of triage, close proximity of other ill or injured or agitated patients, and the flow and numbers of caregivers can contribute to patients' and family members' feelings of helplessness and distress.

Communication with patients and their family members requires the rapid establishment of rapport. Clinicians must sometimes deliver bad news or help families make difficult decisions, typically without the benefit of an ongoing relationship. As patients are transferred from one clinician to the next and from service to service, effective communication among health care workers is vitally important to ensure quality care.

In these times of vulnerability and stress, patients and family members are exceptionally sensitive to the nuances of communication that might convey meaning or hope. The challenge, then, for healthcare team members is to effectively and efficiently establish a relationship with patients. Effective and empathic communication promotes excellent clinical care, enhances patient and family satisfaction and reduces the risk of complaints.

The ***Strangers in Crisis: Communication for Emergency Department and Hospital-Based Clinicians*** workshop is designed to help clinicians manage communication challenges in the emergency department, urgent care and hospital inpatient settings.

Strangers in Crisis workshops may be structured as one-day or half-day programs for clinicians and health care workers who work in emergency care, urgent care and hospital inpatient settings. Developed in cooperation with Kaiser Permanente of Northern California, the ***Strangers in Crisis*** workshop is highly interactive and engages participants in opportunities to practice communication skills with patients, families and other health care team members.

Audience

The ***Strangers in Crisis*** workshop is targeted toward emergency department, urgent care and hospital inpatient team members. The content is particularly useful for clinicians including emergency physicians, residents, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, social workers, clinical educators and EMS practitioners; clinical specialists including hospitalists, intensivists, proceduralists, radiologists and anesthesiologists; and other members of the health care team including lab technicians, unit clerks and porters.

The workshop can accommodate 6 to 24 participants to ensure optimal experiential learning in small and large group exercises.

Content

The ***Strangers in Crisis*** curriculum is based on theories and models of communication in three areas:

- 1) clinician-patient communication,
- 2) communication with families of patients, and
- 3) healthcare team communication.

As with all IHC communications curricula, ***Strangers in Crisis*** draws on the published research evidence on the importance of communication in healthcare generally, with specific emphasis on the ED and in-patient hospital units.

The workshop acknowledges the unique experiences and challenges of clinicians, patients and families in ED, urgent care and hospital settings. The Institute's 4E Model (Engage, Empathize, Educate and Enlist) has been adapted to address clinician-patient communication challenges related to the intense information processing needs and high communication loads in the hospital, urgent care and ED. A key feature of this workshop is to facilitate participants' identification of frustrations and skill gaps they have encountered in ED, urgent care and hospital communications. The program provides a toolkit of techniques to close those gaps and a structured and safe environment for practicing the techniques.

Participants learn specific skills for communicating with families and evidence-based strategies and tools for team communication. ***Strangers in Crisis*** presents compelling evidence of the value for patient safety and quality of care of effective clinical hand-offs, prompt and complete exchange and verification of information, and advocacy when situation awareness is lost. Situations unique to emergency care are addressed, such as families' preferences for viewing resuscitation attempts.

Strangers in Crisis includes discussion about strategies for managing compassion fatigue, a condition for which emergency personnel are at very high risk.

The full-day workshop provides a greater number of case studies for discussion and expanded large and small group exercises, in addition to the fundamental content presented in the half-day workshop.

Expectations

Strangers in Crisis is a brief, intensive and primarily experiential learning opportunity. Learners are expected to participate in all large and small group activities. To minimize distraction, IHC recommends that learners be freed from additional work-related tasks for the duration of the training.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the ***Strangers in Crisis: Communication for Emergency Department and Hospital-Based Clinicians*** workshop, learners will:

1. Appreciate the importance of communication in all health care encounters and specifically in emergency department (ED) and hospital settings
2. Understand the role of communication in outcomes and adherence, as well as in increasing patient, family and team satisfaction and reducing complaints in EDs and hospital encounters
3. Be able to identify specific skills for communicating with patients, families and team members in ED and hospital settings
4. Demonstrate two communication skills to use with patients, families and team members in ED and hospital settings

Methodology

The ***Strangers in Crisis*** workshop consists of brief presentations, interactive exercises, videotaped case studies and skill practice sessions with peers to build participant awareness, knowledge, skills and confidence regarding communication in these settings. Case examples frame realistic issues involving patients, families and teams. The workshop workbook includes an extensive annotated bibliography (also available [online](#)). At the end of the workshop, participants are asked to commit to trying out one or two new communication strategies and then to evaluate the outcomes associated with these approaches.

Experiential learning exercises are an essential element of this curriculum. They are designed to meet diverse learning styles, in accordance with evidence-based theory on adult learning. Exercises are graduated to promote participation in a supportive and safe environment.

Faculty

Faculty for ***Strangers in Crisis*** are physicians, nurses or behavioral scientists with extensive experience as teachers and clinicians. All faculty members have completed an extensive faculty development program sponsored by IHC.

CME

The Institute for Healthcare Communication (IHC) takes responsibility for the content, quality and scientific integrity of this CME/CE activity. IHC is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) to provide continuing medical education for physicians. The Institute for Healthcare Communication designates the ***half-day Strangers in Crisis workshop*** for a maximum of 4 *AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™* and the ***full-day Strangers in Crisis workshop*** for a maximum of 6.3 *AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™*. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Continuing education (CE) credit may be available to other healthcare professional participants. IHC will provide a certification of completion, which can be submitted to trainees' respective accrediting organizations. IHC is pleased to provide any necessary documentation to help individuals gain CE credits for completion of this workshop.

For further information, please contact:

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