



IHC Patient-Centered Communication Series:
Candid Conversations:
Talking with Female Patients about Sexual Health
Workshop

Overview

A pervasive “don’t ask, don’t tell” dynamic infuses issues around sexual health. Health care practitioners consistently underestimate the prevalence and importance of their patients’ sexual concerns. Few providers incorporate questions about patients’ sexual health as part of routine medical history-taking and many patients with concerns about their sexual health or functioning do not broach the topic with their providers. This may be due to discomfort based on embarrassment or time constraints. Clinicians may feel they lack adequate preparation to help patients, or they may believe that sexual history is not relevant to the patient’s chief complaint. Some clinicians are not aware of therapeutic options to help patients.

The research literature documents the extent of the problem. The Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors found that while nearly 50 percent of all sexually active respondents (adult men and women, worldwide) had experienced a sexual problem, fewer than 20 percent of those individuals sought medical help. (Moreira ED, 2005) Data suggest 40 percent of women experience sexual health issues and, of those women, a sizable proportion (12 percent) report feeling distress about the problem. (Kingsberg, 2009)

Incorporating a sexual history promotes a more comprehensive overview of patients’ physical and emotional health and well-being, informs appropriate discussion about potentially risky behaviors and builds trust.

Candid Conversations: Talking with Female Patients about Sexual Health is designed to help healthcare practitioners hone their skills raising and addressing issues around female sexual health. ICH’s highly interactive educational program combines didactic, print and experiential techniques to enhance communication and improve patient care.

Audience

Candid Conversations: Talking with Female Patients about Sexual Health is targeted toward clinicians in family practice, internal medicine and women's health. A wide variety of clinicians have benefitted from the ***Candid Conversations*** curriculum: clinical psychologists, sexual health educators and physicians, residents and nurse practitioners in internal medicine, family practice, oncology, gynecology and gynecological surgery. This workshop is appropriate for clinicians at all stages of their careers.

Workshops can accommodate 6 to 30 participants to ensure effective experiential learning in small and large groups.

Content

The content, principles and models used in this workshop are supported by extensive research conducted over the past thirty years. Specific communication tasks and associated skills focus on helping clinicians normalize the inclusion of questions about sexual health into regular clinical visits and apply core communication skills to engage the patient as a person, empathize with the patient and seek the patient's permission to provide education about sexual health concerns.

As part of this workshop participants learn the rationale underlying enhanced communication skills and review the research evidence supporting the proactive and routine incorporation of a sexual health history into the medical interview. They practice specific communication models and give and receive feedback in a supportive setting. The Ask-Tell-Ask model is designed to provide patient education and assess patients' comprehension. The Ex-PLISSIT model of intervention is a systematic approach to issues around sexual health. It entails seeking **P**ermission to discuss sexual health issues, providing **L**imited **I**nformation to educate the patient, making **S**pecific **S**uggestions based on the patient's concerns, and offering **I**ntensive **T**reatment as needed to provide or refer to specialized help. Together, these skills enable the clinician to elicit a sexual history and thereby provide the patient with more comprehensive care.

As with all IHC communication workshops, an annotated [bibliography](#) is included with the workbook provided to learners. We encourage learners to use the bibliography after the workshop as a resource for further professional development on patient-centered communication and theory and resources for sex therapy.

Expectations

The ***Candid Conversations*** workshop is predicated on active participation of all learners. Learners are expected to participate in all large and small group exercises and discussions. This is a validated approach for adult learners, grounded in the research on cooperative learning and action learning. Learners consistently report high value hearing from their peers and sharing their experiences in this structured and safe environment.

To minimize distraction, IHC recommends that learners be freed from additional work-related tasks for the duration of the training.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, learners will be able to:

1. Identify three evidenced-supported reasons for the importance of proactively and routinely talking with female patients about their sexual health.
2. Describe the four phases of the Ex-PLISSIT practice model.
3. Demonstrate increased confidence in discussing the sexual health needs of female patients.
4. Demonstrate the ability to apply the ASK-TELL-ASK model of providing patient education and assessing comprehension.
5. Describe at least three distinct communication tools for discussing sexual health issues with female patients.
6. Select and commit to using two communication tools in practice for six weeks following the workshop.

Methodology

The workshop is a fast-paced interactive communication program with an emphasis on opportunities to practice skills and techniques, not simply to hear about them. More than 60 percent of the workshop is devoted to experiential learning. Learners work in large and small groups to understand the barriers to broaching conversations around sexual health, analyze videotaped patient cases and practice newly-learned skills in contextually relevant cases.

All teaching methodologies are supported by research and practical evidence, taking into account varying individual learning styles and theories and practice of adult learning.

Faculty

Faculty members who teach IHC's ***Candid Conversations*** workshop have completed a comprehensive faculty development program. The faculty program includes individualized coaching conducted by IHC to prepare faculty to teach and facilitate the workshop, deepen their own communication skills, and enhance their knowledge of female sexual function.

CME/CE

The Institute for Healthcare Communication is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) to sponsor continuing medical education for physicians. IHC takes

responsibility for the content, quality, and scientific integrity of this CE/CME activity. **Candid Conversations: Talking with Female Patients about Sexual Health** is designated by the Institute for Healthcare Communication as a continuing medical education activity meeting the criteria for 3.0 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Non-physician participants receive a certificate of attendance upon completion of the workshop that can be submitted to various accrediting bodies for continuing education credits.

For further information, please contact:

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Notes

Kingsberg SA. (2009, May). Evaluation and treatment of female sexual disorders. *Int Urogynecol J Pelvic Floor Dysfunct.*, 20(Suppl 1), S33-43.

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Nusbaum M, Gamble G, Skinner B, Heiman, J. (2000, Mar). The High Prevalence of Sexual Concerns Among Women Seeking Routine Gynecological Care. *J Fam Pract*, 49(3), 229-32.