



IHC Patient-Centered Communication Series: Connected: Communicating and Computing in the Exam Room

Introduction

Computers and electronic health records have brought great advances to the practice of medicine. With the information a clinician needs instantly available through the electronic medical record, many health care organizations have literally done away with paper patient charts. This technological advance comes at the cost of adding another element that clinicians and office staff must juggle when caring for patients in their clinics and hospitals.

In an effort to prepare clinicians and staff for the challenges of communicating and computing in the exam room, IHC has developed *Connected*.

The Challenge

The exam room computer offers new avenues for inviting patients to become active partners in their health care. It also can become a barrier to effective communication. Busy clinicians, whose tasks are now accomplished through the computer, are sometimes drawn immediately to the screen, omitting a critical opportunity to start with a personal connection with the patient. As clinicians have a wealth of data at their fingertips, patients may experience them as distracted by the computer. When it is not introduced, patients have told researchers that they believed that clinicians were doing computer work unrelated to their visit. For those patients who see the clinician with a friend or family member, the on-screen display can pose a threat to confidentiality. Often, the patient first experiences the computer with the medical assistant. When the medical assistant and clinician are not working in concert, patients can be alienated by computer use.

The challenge is to provide clinicians and office staff with tools to help them communicate effectively with patients while using exam room computers. With effective communication, patients will experience computers as a valuable medical tool that enhances their confidence in care, encourages adherence to medical regimens, and invites their active participation in maintaining their health.

The Program

Connected is a 2.75-hour program for clinicians and medical office staff who use electronic health records while interacting with patients. Developed in collaboration with Kaiser Permanente's national program for information technology, the program is based on a review of the literature and observations in a variety of clinics with exam room computers. The workshop is highly interactive and engages learners to consider both the challenges and opportunities that the exam room computer presents to the patient's relationship with clinicians and staff. A model for communication is taught and specific skills are practiced during the workshop.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the workshop, learners will:

- Develop increased skills and greater confidence in your ability to communicate effectively while using the Electronic Health Record
- Identify techniques that communicate to patients, “We know you”
- Identify techniques that enhanced shared decision making and patient satisfaction through the use of the EHR

Process

Connected consists of mini presentations, interactive exercises, case study, and small group skills rehearsal to build learner awareness, knowledge, skills, and confidence regarding communicating and computing in the exam room. The case study realistically depicts a patient’s interactions with both a medical assistant and clinician who use the computer during the visit. During skill rehearsal learners select specific techniques to practice while also having an opportunity to view the computer from the patient’s perspective. At the end of the workshop learners are asked to commit to trying out one or two new communication strategies for a period of five weeks and then to evaluate the outcomes associated with these approaches.

Faculty

Faculty members who teach IHC’s *Connected* 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 to explore strategies to support and advocate for greater attention to relationship-building and communication skills at their home institutions.

For further information, please contact:

Institute for Healthcare Communication
100 Great Plain Road
Danbury, CT 06811
(800) 800-5907
info@healthcarecomm.org
www.healthcarecomm.org