

Exploring Selected Research on Physician-
Patient Communication: Some Practical
Implications for Medical Students
and Physicians

Donald J. Cegala, Ph.D.

Emeritus Professor

School of Communication and
Department of Family Medicine

The Ohio State University

PACE

<http://patcom.jcomm.ohio-state.edu>

- Presenting detailed information about how you are feeling
- Asking questions if desired information is not provided
- Checking your understanding of information that is given to you
- Expressing any concerns

Components of Patient Participation

- Information Seeking (questions and verifications)
- Assertive Utterances (e.g., expressed opinion, preference, recommendation, disagreement)
- Information Provision
- Expression of Affect (positive or negative emotions)

Patient Participation Studies

- Cegala, D. J., Street, R. L., Jr., & Clinch, C. R. (2007). The impact of patient participation on physicians' information provision during a primary care medical interview. *Health Communication, 21*, 177-185
- Cegala, D. J., & Post, D. M. (2009). The impact of patients' participation on physicians' patient-centered communication. *Patient Education and Counseling, 77*, 202-208.
- Cegala, D.J. & Nwomeh, B. (2010). The impact of parents' participation on pediatric surgeons' discourse. Manuscript in preparation.

Key Characteristics

- Interviews audio taped and transcripts made.
- Patients' and physicians' discourse coded.
- Central question: How, and to extent, does patient participation influence physicians' communication style?
- Same physicians were observed with high and low participation patients.

Results

- Physicians' communication style significantly differed when interacting with high vs. low participation patients.
 - More patient-centered
 - More informative about treatment (e.g., benefits, risks, side effects, treatment options)
 - More informative about surgical procedures and prognosis

Patient Agendas

- About 40% of primary care patients have more than one complaint.
- Average number of complaints is about three.
- Often the first stated complaint isn't main reason.

Beckman & Frankel (1984), *Annals of Internal Medicine*; Marvel et al. (1999), *JAMA*

- On average, physicians interrupt within 18-23 seconds.
- Most interruptions occur immediately after first complaint is stated.
- Most interruptions were closed questions.
- Most interrupted patients never completed their agenda, most of those who did were able to complete in less than 1 minute, no more than 2.5 minutes.

Three “Simple” Rules

- Be quiet and listen
- Resist temptation to ask questions
- Limit responses to continuers and “Is there something else you want to discuss?”