



Editorial

Importance of patient education in the management of chronic diseases

Patient education is the process of enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their personal health-related behavior.¹ Patient education regarding the control and management of diseases is an inseparable part of healthcare services and requires careful consideration and planning. In spite of the plethora of literature and theories on the issues of behavior and change of behavior, such as the Health Belief Model, self-efficacy theory, Locus of Control Theory, Social Learning Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Adult Learning Theory, in practice, there are few consensuses on who is eligible to educate patients with chronic disease and how this education should be practiced.

We must educate patients to actively participate in the control and management of their disease for the following reasons (to mention but a few):

- Lack of patient and community participation undermines expensive and time consuming healthcare services.
- All patients, particularly those who suffer from a chronic disease, are actually involved in the management of their problems, and if they are not educated, they may commit medical errors and mismanage their problems.
- Without active, deliberate, and informed participation of patients, as a trained team member, in the process of management of their chronic diseases all efforts of healthcare providers and patients may become less effective, more expensive, and sometimes, unsatisfactory for both parties.
- The informed participation of patients in their own healthcare activities leads to a sense of ownership and control on their life and destiny for patients.

Based on the abovementioned points, patient education is a necessity for the professional endeavor of chronic disease management. However, training the trainers in the field of patient education remains a matter of debate and concern. Many healthcare disciplines provide patient education, yet few receive specific training in the field.² Moreover, regardless of the disciplines, it is important to be clear about who can be trained to train the patients. For various reasons, often with good intentions, many people, including patients and health professionals, get involved in patient education both formally and informally.³ The involvement of people who are not professionally eligible and appropriately trained in the process of patient education not only may harm the patients, but also may hinder the effectiveness of healthcare services.⁴

The following criteria may be useful for selecting patient educators:

1. Possessing knowledge and expertise in the field of the diseases
2. Favorable attitude toward his or her professional limits and boundaries
3. Familiarity with educational theories and practices of patient education

To summarize, patient education can play an important role in the management of chronic diseases. There are theories and educational principles to inform patient education practices. Moreover, patient educators must be educated in the field of the diseases and on educational and theoretical principles. Research and debate on patient education must be encouraged among professionals and researchers.

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