

Factors Associated with Patients' Perceptions of Healthcare Providers' Communication Behavior

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Background

The manner in which physicians communicate with their patients has a significant impact on patients' health behaviors and health outcomes.

Three important patient-centered communication goals have been identified for physicians to accomplish during interactions with their patients:

1. Establish a good *interpersonal relationship*
2. Facilitate *information exchange*
3. Facilitate patient *involvement in decision-making*

Purpose

The aim of our analysis was to gain a clearer understanding of the sociodemographic characteristics, healthcare access, and health status variables that influence patients' perceptions of the quality of communication with their healthcare providers utilizing a national sample.

We examined differences in patients' perceptions of healthcare providers' behaviors by key sociodemographic, healthcare access, and health status variables.

Methods

Data Source

Data were from the 2003 Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS).

HINTS collects nationally representative data every two years on the American public's need for, access to, and use of cancer information.

Survey Items

- **Sociodemographic Characteristics:** sex, age, race, ethnicity, education, income.
- **Health Care Access, Use and Trust:** insurance, usual source of health care.
- **Health Status:** perceived health status, cancer history.
- **Depressive Symptomology:** Respondents were asked to rate five point scales the amount of time they experienced each 6 depressive symptoms. Responses were summed into a composite depressive symptoms score ranging from 6 to 30 with higher scores indicating greater depression (Cronbach's alpha=0.81).
- **Provider Communication Behavior:** Patients' perception of patient-provider communication was assessed using items borrowed from the Consumer Assessment of Health Plans Study. Respondents indicated on a four-point scale (always, usually, sometimes, never) how often *doctors or other healthcare providers:* 1) listened carefully to you, 2) explained things in a way you could understand, 3) showed respect for what you had to say, 4) spent enough time with you, and 5) involved you in decisions about your healthcare. We reversed scores so that higher scores indicated greater endorsement of the healthcare provider behavior and created a composite score from the sum of ratings on each item. The resulting composite ranged from 5 to 20 (Cronbach's alpha=0.82).

Data Collection, Response Rates, and Sample

- Data were collected from October 2002 through April 2003.
- The survey was administered to a representative sample of U.S. households using computer-assisted random-digit dialing from all telephone exchanges in the U.S.
 - Exchanges with high numbers of Blacks and Hispanics were over-sampled.
- Complete interviews were conducted with 6149 adults.
 - The final response rate for the household screener was 55% and the final response rate for extended interview was 62.8%.
- The sample used in our analyses included 5343 respondents who reported that they saw a healthcare provider during the last year.

Data Analysis

- SUDAAN was used to calculate the following:

- Mean patient rating of physician behavior for various subgroups defined by sociodemographic, healthcare access, and health status variables.
- Pearson correlation between ratings of healthcare providers' behavior and depressive symptom scores.
- Linear regression analyses to examine the association of sociodemographic characteristics, healthcare access, and health status variables with patients' ratings of providers' communication behavior.

Results

Ratings of providers' communication were favorable (Mean=17.3). Table 1 summarizes patients' ratings of communication behavior for subgroups.

	Mean Patient Rating	N	SE Mean
Sociodemographics			
Sex			
Male	17.3	1851	0.09
Female	17.4	3384	0.06
Race			
Non-Hispanic white	17.5	3622	0.05
Non-Hispanic black	17.5	592	0.18
Hispanic	16.6	553	0.24
Other or multiple races	16.7	242	0.25
Income			
<\$35,000	17.1	1983	0.11
\$35,000 to <\$75,000	17.4	1629	0.10
\$75,000+	17.5	1031	0.10
Education			
Less than high school	17.1	551	0.19
High school	17.3	1466	0.09
Some college	17.4	1388	0.10
College graduate	17.5	1655	0.07
Age			
18-34	17.1	1245	0.11
35-64	17.3	2849	0.06
65+	17.9	1132	0.10
Employment			
Employed	17.3	2890	0.07
Out of work	16.8	251	0.27
Retired, student, homemaker	17.6	1664	0.11
Unable to work	16.8	252	0.21
Marital Status			
Married	17.4	2731	0.05
Divorced, separated, widowed	17.3	1365	0.14
Never married	17.1	799	0.13
Unmarried couple	17.1	162	0.25
Healthcare Access			
Health Insurance			
No	16.3	443	0.22
Yes	17.5	4619	0.05
Usual Provider			
No	16.5	1250	0.12
Yes	17.6	3972	0.06
Health Status			
Perceived Health			
Excellent/very good	17.8	2213	0.09
Good	17.4	1705	0.08
Fair/Poor	16.5	1154	0.15
Cancer History			
No	17.3	4515	0.06
Yes	17.4	707	0.16
Depressive symptoms Score	Pearson r	N	p-value
	-.20	5030	<.0001

Table 2 summarizes the results of the linear regression analyses.

	Beta	SE Beta	t-test	p-value	95% CI	
					lower	upper
Sociodemographics						
Sex						
Male	0	.	.	.	.	.
Female	0.06	0.14	0.42	0.68	-0.22	0.33
Race						
Non-Hispanic white	0	.	.	.	.	.
Non-Hispanic black	0.22	0.21	1.07	0.29	-0.20	0.64
Hispanic	-0.44	0.25	-1.75	0.09	-0.95	0.07
Other or multiple races	-0.49	0.31	-1.58	0.12	-1.11	0.13
Income						
<\$35,000	0	.	.	.	.	.
\$35,000 to <\$75,000	-0.13	0.15	-0.87	0.39	-0.43	0.17
\$75,000+	-0.14	0.17	-0.80	0.42	-0.48	0.21
Education						
Less than high school	0	.	.	.	.	.
High school	-0.25	0.24	-1.03	0.31	-0.74	0.24
Some college	-0.13	0.24	-0.57	0.57	-0.61	0.34
College graduate	-0.39	0.20	-1.92	0.06	-0.80	0.02
Age						
18-34	0	.	.	.	.	.
35-64	0.06	0.15	0.40	0.69	-0.25	0.37
65+	0.30	0.24	1.28	0.20	-0.17	0.78
Employment						
Employed	0	.	.	.	.	.
Out of work	0.28	0.33	0.86	0.39	-0.38	0.95
Retired, student, homemaker	0.03	0.14	0.23	0.82	-0.26	0.32
Unable to work	0.13	0.29	0.43	0.67	-0.47	0.72
Marital Status						
Married	0	.	.	.	.	.
Divorced, separated, widowed	-0.09	0.16	-0.57	0.57	-0.41	0.23
Never married	0.06	0.18	0.37	0.71	-0.29	0.42
Unmarried couple	0.03	0.25	0.11	0.91	-0.47	0.53
Healthcare Access						
Health Insurance						
No	0	.	.	.	.	.
Yes	0.68	0.25	2.79	0.007	0.19	1.18
Usual Provider						
No	0	.	.	.	.	.
Yes	1.14	0.16	7.36	0.000	0.83	1.46
Health Status						
Perceived Health						
Excellent/very good	0	.	.	.	.	.
Good	-0.15	0.12	-1.27	0.21	-0.38	0.09
Fair/Poor	-0.96	0.20	-4.74	0.000	-1.36	-0.55
Cancer History						
No	0	.	.	.	.	.
Yes	-0.20	0.21	-0.96	0.34	-0.61	0.22
Depressive symptoms Score	-0.11	.02	-5.68	0.000	-0.15	-0.07

Conclusions

- Provider communication can have a significant impact on health behaviors and outcomes.

- Our findings may inform efforts to enhance communication with subgroups of patients through improvements in clinical practice and health policies.

• Awareness that individuals with poorer health and/or depressive symptoms may perceive interactions with physicians as inadequate may indicate that additional efforts need to be made to effectively communicate important health information.

• Access to a usual source of healthcare and health insurance influences patients' ratings of providers' communication behavior; continued policy-level efforts to provide access to healthcare and continuity of care are needed.

