Integrating the patient & caregiver voice: the role of clinician skills

Anthony Back MD
University of Washington
How do physicians talk about values & goals?
A big disconnect between what’s important, & what happens

736 physicians Feb 2016

‘Important’ 99%
‘My responsibility’ 75%
Billed Medicare 14%
What words do physicians actually use?

“Do you want us to do CPR, I mean pump on your chest like you might have seen on TV, if your heart stops?”

J Palliat Med 2010
Why don’t physicians try?

- Don’t have time: 66%
- Not sure time is right: 60%
- Unsure what to say: 46%
- No formal training: 68%
How often do they use skills critical to overcoming barriers?

In one study, oncologists made empathic statements in 11% of their conversations.

Ann Intern Med 2015
Physicians aren’t good judges of their own communication skills

Patients’ Ratings of their Physician’s Skills

Physician’s Ratings of Their Own Skills

J Palliat Med 2013
They didn’t have training.
See emotion as a threat.
Tend to blame patients.
Patients at risk: 2.3 million
What research proves: communication is a learned skill.
Skills training changes behavior

After training, physicians:

• Use more empathy
• Ask more questions to understand
• Explore more values

p<.003

J Palliat Med 2014
Skills training persists over time

In a randomized trial in the UK, improvements persisted 12 months later.

\( p < .001 \)

Br J Cancer 2003
Physicians recommend this training to their colleagues

In our first study:

“Would you recommend this to your colleagues?” was 95% positive

JAMA Internal Medicine 2007
Greater physician skills, more patient trust

Randomized trial of oncologists
Trained oncologists used more empathy $p = .24$
Patients of trained oncologists had higher trust $p = .036$

Ann Intern Med 2011
The training was only available in research studies.
High-quality, evidence based training is ready.
Sharpen your communication skills.
Learn new tools.

vitaltalk.org
Build your communication superpowers

The VitalTalk Tips app enables physicians, nurses, and other clinicians to improve their communication skills for patients who have a serious illness. For clinicians in hospital medicine, oncology, cardiology, nephrology, hepatology, neurology, trauma, emergency medicine, primary care, pediatrics, and palliative care.

Download on the App Store
GET IT ON Google play
There are no incentives for clinicians to invest in training.
More skills, less burnout

1537 vs 1951 physicians

Non-randomized

• Increased **HCAHPS** scores p<.03
• **Burnout** scores reduced p<.04

J Gen Intern Med 2016
Patients are at risk. Training works. We’re scaling it up.
Incentives could accelerate clinician uptake.