

Steps toward preparing people with complex communication needs
for emergencies and future medical encounters

Sarah Blackstone and Harvey Pressman

Abstract

This session will focus on how to prepare people with complex communication needs (CCN) to communicate effectively and efficiently during the many future medical encounters each will inevitably face over a lifetime. We will address ways to prevent or mitigate the communication barriers and breakdowns that so often occur during emergencies, as well as during more routine interactions with medical personnel in office visits and hospitalizations.

Description

This session will focus on how to prepare people with complex communication needs (CCN) to communicate effectively and efficiently during the many future medical encounters each will inevitably face over a lifetime. We will address ways to prevent or mitigate the communication breakdowns that so often occur during emergencies, as well as during the more typical and routine interactions that take place during office visits and hospitalizations, etc.. We will make the case that because people with communication challenges are at very high risk for communication breakdowns during interactions with health care providers, professionals with expertise in communication and its disorders should (must) assume responsibility and help them (and their families) learn to navigate the communication barriers they will face during medical encounters.

The session will be interactive. We will focus on practical solutions in real-life situations and encourage participants to share ideas, strategies and tools that can help (1) individuals with CCN prepare, (2) help the family members (and carers) who support them, and (3) encourage community professionals (e.g., classroom teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, rehabilitation counsellors, and so on) to help these individuals prepare for medical encounters by teaching them about what to expect, how to prepare in advance, and about patient rights. We will stress low-cost and

no-cost ideas and resources that are readily accessible. Participants will also learn how to access:

- A collection of healthcare communication resources that individuals can use to prepare for office visits or an emergency, at bedside during a hospitalization, for discharge from a facility or when transferred from one facility to another, and so on.
- Samples of patient encounter communication boards that can be put to immediate use.
- A collection of healthcare communication resources that practitioners who work within healthcare settings can introduce to nursing personnel
- Examples from colleagues who use some of these "tools of the trade" in real-life situations.
- Materials that can help facilitate difficult end-of-life conversations with medical providers and ways to determine decisional capacity.

Learning more about navigating around health care communication barriers may also prove personally useful to participants with no apparent disabilities because most of us need to learn to become more active "consumers" of medical services. Finally, the session will seek to help participants learn more about how to stay "up to date" on these topics as medical practices and policies change.

References

- Bartlett, G., Blais, R., Tamblyn, R., Clermont, R. J., & MacGibbon, B. (2008). Impact of patient communication problems on the risk of preventable adverse events in acute care settings. *CMAJ*, 178(12), 1555-1562.
- Blackstone, S.W. & Pressman, H. (under review). Patient communication in health care settings: Missed opportunities for AAC specialists?
- Blackstone, S.W. & Kailes, J. I. (2015). Integrating emergency and disaster resilience into your everyday practice. In S. W. Blackstone, D. R. Beukelman & K.M Yorkstone (eds.) *Patient Provider Communication: Roles of speech-language pathologists and other health care providers* (pp.103-138). San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, Inc.
- Blackstone, S. W., Ruschke, K., Wilson-Stronks, A. & Lee, C. (2011, March). Converging

communication vulnerabilities in healthcare: An emerging role for speech-language pathologists and audiologists. *Perspectives on Communication Disorders and Sciences in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations*, 18 (1), 3-11

Collier, B. McGhie-Richmond, & Self, H. (2010). Exploring communication assistants as an option for increasing communication access for people who use augmentative communication. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 26, pp. 48-59.

Kagan, A., Black, S., & Duchan, J. (2001). Training volunteers as conversation partners using "Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia" (SCA): a controlled trial. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 44(3), 624-638.

Hemsley, B. Kuek, M. Bastock, K., Scarinci, N. & Davidson, B. (2014). Parents and children with cerebral palsy discuss communication needs in hospital. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 363-374.

Hemsley, B., Lee, S., Munro, K., Seeda, N., Bastock, K. & Davidson, B. (2014). Supporting communication for children with cerebral palsy in hospital: Views of community and hospital staff. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 17(3), 156-166.

doi:10.3109/17518423.2012.741149

Kagan, A., Black, S., & Duchan, J. (2001). Training volunteers as conversation partners using "Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia" (SCA): a controlled trial. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 44(3), 624-638.

Law, J. Bunning, K., Byng, S., Farrelly, S. & Heyman, B. (2005). Making sense in primary care: Leveling the playing field for individuals with communication difficulties. *Disability & society*, 20, 169-184.

Morris, M., Dudgeon, B. & Yorkston, K. M. (2013). A qualitative study of adult AAC users' experiences communicating with medical providers. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, a, 472-481.

Patak, L., Wilson-Stronks, A., Costello, J., Kleinpell, R., Henneman, E., Person, C., & Happ, M. (2009). Improving Patient-Provider Communication: A Call to Action. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 39(9), 372-376.

Rayner, H., & Marshall, J. (2003). Training volunteers as conversation partners for people with aphasia. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 38(2), 149-164.

[Thomas C.](#), Medicine, gender, and disability: Disabled women's health care encounters. [Health Care Women Int.](#) 2001 Apr-May; 22(3):245-62.

University of Washington. (2012). Getting the Most Out of Health Care Visits [Factsheet]. Multiple Sclerosis Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. <http://msrrtc.washington.edu/>.