Educational support materials for ABIM’s *Care for the Underserved Module*

**Question 7**

A major function of the medical encounter is educating the patient. Unfortunately, patients recall and comprehend as little as 50% of the information that is presented by their physicians. Patients with limited health literacy are even less likely to recall and comprehend medical information.\(^1\)

One strategy for effective physician-patient communication is to confirm patients’ understanding by asking them to repeat what was discussed during the encounter.\(^2-4\) Benefits of the “teach back method” that have been demonstrated in studies include glycemic control and correct use of medications.\(^1,5\)

Patients with low literacy often avoid the embarrassment of having their lack of understanding revealed by remaining quiet.\(^6\) Merely asking a patient if they have understood is less likely to reveal confusion than the “teach back,” or “show-me” approach. Checking for lapses in recall and understanding may also uncover health beliefs and encourage interaction. Health care providers can then tailor their explanations based on the patients’ understanding.\(^1,7-12\) When confirming comprehension, it important to recognize both how often healthcare providers fail to provide simple explanations and how intimidating the health care environment can be. Acknowledging these difficulties explicitly may be useful. The clinician might ask, for example: “To be sure I explained it to you well enough, would you mind showing me how you will take the new medicine?”

Multiple modes of communication are also likely to improve comprehension and retention of medical information and instruction. Videos, audiotapes, written information, health education classes, and review with other healthcare providers can reinforce, clarify and remind patients of important information. Engaging multiple members of the health care team in patient education, writing simple instructions and making drawings are all useful techniques.\(^1,12,13\)

*For further information, see the following:*  

*This educational support material was created by the Society of General Internal Medicine’s Disparities Task Force. For more information, visit [www.sgim.org/go/disparities](http://www.sgim.org/go/disparities)*
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