DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY FORUM

What Language Are You Speaking? Why Patient Communication is a Patient Safety Issue

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There is no argument that effective communication is critical to the success of any work environment. Communication within the health care environment can be particularly complex, challenging and, at times, even troubling. Negative patient experiences and outcomes can sometimes be attributed to poor communication and misperceptions among health care providers.

Mario Moussa, Principal, Center for Applied Research (CFAR) and co-author of the book, *The Art of Woo*, presented a framework for exploring communication styles. Dr. Moussa has worked closely with hospitals and providers and, through his research, he has captured the communication gaps and misunderstandings that affect the quality of care. For example, through interviews he was able to illustrate the mixed messages that occur directly between nurses, attending physicians, and residents. He also discovered a consistent lack of awareness and misperception that clinicians express about the training and expertise of their colleagues.

Moussa believes that people communicate on six different channels: authority; rationality; vision; relationship; interests/incentives; and politics. Moussa explains the importance identifying your own channel while tuning in to the channel of the other person with whom you are interacting. This is one way to overcome barriers, sell ideas, and facilitate change. Moussa also emphasized the significance of relationship building and developing a deeper understanding of the cultural context of an organization or interaction.

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