

“Digame, ¿Por qué viene?” Patient orientation in physician-patient communication in primary healthcare centers in Nicaragua.

Introduction.

Provider-patient communication skills and the patient-centered approach, although internationally accepted as basic competences for healthcare providers, are hardly considered in the medical curriculum of most Latin American medical faculties. In Nicaragua, as well as in other developing countries, the biomedical model is the predominant concept and poor communication is widely prevailing in public services. The aim of this research is to describe and evaluate physician-patient communication in medical encounters in primary health care settings in Nicaragua. Health centers from Managua, Rivas and Matagalpa were involved.

Methods.

Two hundred and seventy-seven consultations from 19 physicians were recorded. The videos were coded in SPSS 16 database and analyzed using the “Calgary-Cambridge guideline to the medical interview”. Sum scores of CGG items were used to look at specific communication skills: gathering information, building a relationship, achieving shared understanding, shared decision making and closing the session.

Results.

Mean scores for all communication measures were very low. Especially items that considered *involving the patient* scored extremely badly: in 40,1 % of all consultations none of the skills aimed at achieving shared understanding were ever used. In 51,3 % no shared decision making skills were demonstrated at all.

In 70% of the consultations, over 75% of the time was spent taking notes.

Correlation analysis using GEE model for clustered data showed that only consultation length and time spent by the physician writing notes were significantly correlated with shared understanding ($p < 0,001$) and building the relationship ($p < 0,001$). Physician and patient gender, age and number of interruptions showed no significant correlation with communication scores.

Discussion/Implications.

Few attempts have been made to improve provider-patient communication in Latin America through training of medical students and doctors; there is a great need of research and training in communication skills and the patient-centered approach as a means to improve quality of care.