

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER. LET'S EDUCATE!

By Laree Fordyce, RPSGT, RST, CCRP

What is patient education? Wikipedia states: *Patient education is the process by which health professionals and others impart information to patients and their caregivers that will alter their health behaviors or improve their health status.*

As we know there are over 80 different sleep disorders. In the sleep center, we see a variety of patients with varying sleep disorders and degrees of illness. Health education is important as it establishes patient's awareness and skills, and encourages them to adopt positive attitudes towards their wellbeing. Health education raises knowledge about physical, mental, emotional and social health. It motivates patients to improve and maintain their health, prevent other diseases, and avoid future unhealthy behaviors.

Training technologists to facilitate patient education is essential. To ensure high quality education and patient comprehension, having a Sleep Educator on your team may be beneficial. A Sleep Educator can help create a successful patient education program and develop resources to ensure high quality and consistency.

With any type of patient education there are basic priorities that should be covered:

- What your patient needs to do and why
- When your patient can expect results (if applicable)
- Warning signs (if any) your patient should watch for
- What your patient should do if a problem occurs

Patient education that is integrated into electronic workflows helps streamline processes and ensures greater consistency and standardization. There are many ways to offer patient education; brochures or other printed materials, podcasts, videos or DVDs, posters, models and/or group classes. Always remember that when dealing with pediatric patients, you not only have to educate the patient, but also the parent(s) and/or caregiver(s). The technologist should know how to teach both the patient (based on age) and the parent regarding sleep disorders and treatment.

When educating a patient and/or their families, the first step is to assess the patient's current knowledge about their condition. Once you have assessed your patient's needs, concerns, readiness to learn, support, and possible barriers to learning, you will need to know how your patient likes to learn. This can guide your choice of education materials and methods.

Be sure to review any materials you plan to use before sharing them with the patient. Keep in mind that no resource is a substitute for one-on-one patient teaching. When teaching a patient about their sleeping problem and treatment options, avoid using fear tactics. Focus instead on the benefits. In some cases, it may not be possible to obtain the right materials for your patients' needs and you might need to create new tools to meet the patient's needs.

Focusing on health education improves patient outcomes and reduces the costs (both financial and human) that individuals, employers, families, insurance companies, medical facilities, and communities, would spend on medical treatment. Taking the time to educate our patients and/or families on their sleep disorder and treatment does take time and effort, but it is rewarding. Our job as healthcare professionals is to help our patients and their families. Remember that successful health education enhances the patient's quality of life and health, and reduces premature death in patients with sleep disorders. ❖



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