

The Strategy of Using Comprehensive English to Overcome Language Barrier in Medical Communication

Yuliana

Universitas Udayana

Article History:

Received: Jul 25, 2023

Revised: Aug 10, 2023

Accepted: Aug 15, 2023

Published: Oct 1, 2023

Keywords:

English, language barrier, medical
communication

*Correspondence Address:

yuliana@unud.ac.id

Abstract: English as an international language is very critical for maintaining good communication in medical healthcare services, especially in global healthcare nowadays. However, using comprehensive English to overcome the language barrier needs a strategy. This paper aims to describe the strategy of using comprehensive English to overcome the language barrier in medical communication. This is a narrative literature review. Literature was taken from Science Direct, PubMed, and Google Scholar, which were published within 10 years (2013-2023). The language barrier in medical communication is not only affected by the type of language (English or any other language) but also includes the limited health literacy of the patient. Therefore, the medical staff should try to communicate in several ways, i.e. using plain language for communication, trying to deliver the information in simple and brief ways. Limited English proficiency of the patients might become another barrier in delivering medical terms. Doctors should try to deliver the information as simple as possible by using comprehensive English. In conclusion, limited English proficiency and health literacy are barriers to medical communication with global patients. The strategies are using simple, brief, plain, and comprehensive English in delivering medical terms and information.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization facilitates the international movement of ideas, people, and goods all over the country, including patient-health staff interaction. The increasing international exchange in human, financial, and capital during globalization makes a significant problem in the medical and health sectors. English as an international language is very critical for maintaining good communication in medical healthcare services, especially in global healthcare nowadays. However, using comprehensive English to overcome the language barrier needs a strategy (Warde et al., 2018).

Using plain language communication for healthcare staff is useful to mitigate the language barrier in medical communication. Patients and health providers have their diversity. This condition brings special challenges in communication. Moreover, not all patients have good health literacy. Plain language communication is giving information in simple and accurate ways. The training of using plain language communication is important to be included in medical education as a core competency (Warde et al., 2018).

The association between health literacy, communication of the patient and healthcare provider, and globalization are very close. The quality of communication determines the patients' participation and well-being. Limited health literacy increases the risks to patients health. Therefore, this condition become a society problem (Haun et al., 2015).

This paper aims to describe the strategy of using comprehensive English to overcome the language barrier in medical communication.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Globalization, healthcare service, and medical students

Globalization is an increase in the international movement of ideas, capital, and people due to advances in technology, economy, and politics. Globalization affects the medical field as well, including undergraduate medical education. These global changes are found in international medical school due to the increasing mobility of students (Crisp & Chen, 2014).

The type of patients is variable based on the diverse population in global healthcare service. Mobility of the patients and the increased cases of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). NCD needs a longer time to manage the patients in the health care system. Patients have to participate more in decision-making, consultation, and self-management. Therefore, interaction and communication between doctors and patients will be more.

Health literacy

Health literacy is the capacity of individuals to comprehend and understand health information in the decision-making process. However, the prevalence of low health literacy is like an iceberg phenomenon among the population. Limited health literacy causes poor health outcomes due to non-compliance with medication and poor self-management. Limited health literacy causes greater expense (approximately 3-5%) for the health care system. To overcome this problem, the communication between patients and healthcare providers must be delivered as clearly as possible (Warde et al., 2018).

Not all patients have good health literacy level. Therefore, healthcare providers should try to explain the medical terms and conditions as simply as possible. Active participation of the patients will be possible when the interaction between patients and healthcare providers is good. The success of doctor-patient communication affects the well-being of the patients (Warde et al., 2018).

The language barrier

The language barrier in medical communication is not only affected by the type of language (English or any other language) but also includes the limited health literacy of the patient. Therefore, the medical staff should try to communicate in several ways, i.e. using plain language for communication, trying to deliver the information in simple and brief ways. Limited English proficiency of the patients might become another barrier in delivering medical terms. Doctors should try to deliver the information as simple as possible by using comprehensive English (Squires, 2021).

Language proficiency is essential for the fluency of communication. This is important in doctor and patient communication. Communication skill is critical for the success of medical management. Sometimes, there is a gap in the perception of medical students and training skills programs (Min et al., 2022).

METHOD

This is a narrative literature review. Literature was taken from Science Direct, PubMed, and Google Scholar, which were published within 10 years (2013-2023).

Inclusion criteria are research and review papers that have full text in English. Exclusion criteria are unavailable text.

DISCUSSION

Plain language communication is useful for mitigating the problems of limited health literacy. Patients' safety is enhanced by maximizing the use of plain language communication. Plain language is communication that is easily understood when it is heard or seen for the first time. Therefore, the patients and caregivers will comprehend the medical instruction and information better. It's better to use an informal tone and common terms as much as possible when explaining the medical condition to the patients and caregivers. Although plain language communication is used, the whole information should be delivered properly and no important information is lost. It should be remembered that patients with moderate to severe diseases tend to face slight difficulties in understanding medical information due to uncomfortable bodies. Therefore, all patients should be assumed to have limited health literacy (Warde et al., 2018).

There are critical plain language materials as follows: use an introduction, logical organization, using short sentences, tables, white space, and minimizing typography. Limited health literacy people tend to read one word at one time. Therefore, they might forget the previous words when they read the end of the sentence. Using simple and short sentences enhances understanding. Plain language communication should be used for oral and written language for the patients. Plain language communication is one of the competencies in medical education. Medical education should be matched to the needs of globalization. Reformation should be done to meet the needs of the society. A suitable approach is a system-based. This system might enhance the connection between education and health (Warde et al., 2018).

Based on the Canadian college for medical education, a good physician should have six roles, i.e. communicator, professional, collaborator, scholar, leader, and health adviser. The communicator role includes the ability to deliver plain language communication. A good communicator should be able to gather and share important information from the patients and their caregivers for health care management. Therefore, plain language communication should be integrated into medical curricula, especially the communicator role subject. The benefits of using plain language communication are for the sake of the patients, healthcare providers, and community. This system should be used in a broader implementation to become a new gold standard in practice (Warde et al., 2018).

Besides the understanding of the medical conditions, patients and doctors need to adapt with the different brand names of medicine. They might require translation. Medical education and instruction need the patients' comprehensive understanding also. Therefore, using simple words is better for the comprehensive understanding, promotes compliance, and care management. For the provider, plain language communication might reduce translator costs and enhance outcomes (Squires, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, limited English proficiency and health literacy are barriers to medical communication with global patients. The strategies are using simple, brief, plain, and comprehensive English in delivering medical terms and information. Understanding the patients' needs will enhance the outcomes and improve care management

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