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## A Model for Improving Patient-Provider Communication in Diabetes Care

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**C**lear communication is a foundation of trust. And in health care, trust between providers and patients is a cornerstone of better outcomes. According to a study led by Leonard L. Berry, PhD, of Texas A&M University, there is “a significant association between the patient-physician relationship and patients’ adherence to their physician’s medical recommendations.” In an attempt to alleviate potential miscommunication that can adversely impact outcomes, consider using the BUILD TRUST acronym, developed as part of our educational effort, as a roadmap to successful communication between providers and patients. The BUILD TRUST model is designed especially for patients with type 2 diabetes.

The patients’ responsibilities make up the first section of the BUILD TRUST model. Diabetes educators can pass these tips along to patients in order to facilitate communication with their physician and other health care providers.

The providers’ responsibilities make up the second half of the model. As a diabetes educator, it is important to cultivate these skills so that you can ensure that your patients understand and respond to your care recommendations.

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Patient BUILD		Provider TRUST	
B	Bring a list of questions	T	Train yourself to use easy-to-understand language
U	Understand your provider’s time demands	R	Respect your patient’s time
I	Inform your provider accurately	U	Understand your patient’s crocieties
L	Log blood sugar measurements	S	Serve as an interpreter and as a guide
D	Define your health care team	T	Team up on treatment

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## **Patients' Responsibilities:**

**Bring a list of questions and concerns to each appointment.** Because some providers may have only a few minutes, write down the questions in order of importance. Having questions addressed in the office is an efficient way of gathering the information needed in a single visit rather than trying to backtrack and ask forgotten questions through phone calls or e-mail.

### **Understand clinicians' time demands.**

Patients can help their providers by being organized, on time, and understanding of unexpected delays.

### **Inform providers accurately by reporting symptoms honestly.**

Providers can better help create a workable diabetes management plan when he or she knows about the patient's range of symptoms, everything from low blood sugar attacks to blurry vision.

### **Log blood sugar measurement and know medications and dosages (including supplements).**

Patients should bring this information to their appointments. Blood sugar logs can help the provider identify blood sugars not in target range that need attention. Having this information readily available will help both the patient and the clinician work together.

### **Define the team, and the captain.**

Patients are the ultimate authority when it comes to their care. Being the captain of their health care team empowers them to assess if providers are meeting their needs—and replace those who are not. By finding the right set of providers, together everyone can create a winning plan to successfully manage diabetes over the long haul.

## **Providers' Responsibilities:**

### **Train yourself to use easy-to-understand language.**

The medical profession has its own language that's easily understood by those who work in the field. Most patients, however, are unfamiliar with the complex terminology. Keeping language simple and using metaphors to illustrate complex ideas will help create a long-term health care relationship.

### **Respect the patient's time.**

Patients have busy lives, too. Squeezing in a medical appointment often means taking time off work or juggling daycare or elder care. Understanding and acknowledging the time constraints of patients can help build a bridge between patients and providers.

### **Understand the patient's stress and uncertainty.**

For many, just being in a provider's office can be a stressful situation. This often goes unexpressed but can manifest as either the patient feeling rushed or lingering to get every single question answered, however unrelated. The point is to acknowledge, at least to yourself, that patients may be apprehensive about being at the appointment. This will attune providers to the cues patients unconsciously provide.

### **Serve as an interpreter and guide.**

Some patients spend a lot of time researching their illness, especially in the Internet age. Subsequently, patients may unintentionally cross the line between informed consumer and over-anxious worrier. Knowing that patients and their families will likely do this research, you can guide them to sites and resources that have helpful, trusted information that will augment your explanations. Helping patients sort through what they read and hear can go a long way to building a bridge of understanding.

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**Team up on treatment.**

Providers have clinical knowledge and experience. Patients bring knowledge about their lives and their condition. Combining both sets of information means the patient and provider together can create a clear and winning game plan for better diabetes management. Everyone wins when strong communications and healing relationships exist. According to research led by John G. Scott, MD, PhD, of the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, clinicians report higher job satisfaction, and healing relationships with providers can help enhance patients' quality of life. Ultimately, this can lead to longer, more productive lives with lower health care costs.

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