

Patient-Provider Communication: Understanding the Role of Patient Activation for Latinos in Mental Health Treatment

Authors of Study: Dharma E Cortes, Norah Mulvaney-Day, Lisa Fortuna, Sarah Reinfeld, and Margarita Alegría

This study examined the Right Question Project-Mental Health (RQP-MH), an intervention designed to teach mental health patients question formulation and decision-making skills to increase their participation in treatment decisions. The study documented and examined the steps patients undertook in becoming "activated" participants in their mental health care.

What are the qualitative indicators of change [because of RQP-MH]? What do participants say about what helps them [regarding RQP-MH]?

The Study

Conducted from October 2004 to January 2006 at two outpatient mental health clinics serving primarily Latino and low-income patients. Participants received the RQP-MH intervention, consisting of three half-hour training sessions over an average of 74 days, teaching them to: (a) identify important mental health care decisions, (b) generate questions around these decisions, and (c) refine questions to facilitate provider communication and informed decision-making. This analysis used qualitative data and organized findings using Finfgeld's (2004) empowerment model, which describes four levels of increasing personal efficacy: participating, choosing, supporting, and negotiating.

Key Findings

- Study suggests patient activation and empowerment are interdependent.
- The RQP-MH intervention appeared to affect mostly the first two levels (i.e., participating and choosing) of the empowerment model.
- Study suggest that cultural and contextual factors can influence the experience of Latinos regarding participation in health care interactions.

Results

Evaluation outcomes indicated that RQP-MH was effective at increasing patient activation by teaching skills in question formulation and increasing patients' participation in decisions. Findings suggest that patient activation and empowerment are interdependent, as the intervention challenged stereotypical models that characterize Latinos as passive actors. Ultimately, the study demonstrated that cultural communication patterns are not a given but are potentially modifiable through targeted strategies.

...there are specific skills that patients need to develop to be able to make informed decisions along with their providers. Two of the most basic skills are question formulation and decision making.

Comparison of Empowerment Levels Before and After RQP-MH: Examples

Empowerment Level	Statements Before RQP-MH	Statements After RQP-MH
Participating	"....so I just trust my psychiatrist now to make decisions even though I didn't feel confident/comfortable with that. I just don't know what questions to ask."	"The medication I was on had some horrible side effects and so I conveyed that to my psychiatrist; we both came to a decision about changing the type of medication I should be on."
Choosing	"[Before] usually she made the decision."	"Now we talk and elaborate on treatment. She asks about my progress... I feel like I pull all the stops now. I tell him how I feel now; I don't let him tell me how I feel."