Background

- Training patients to be good communicators remains an essential, yet understudied area (Bylund et al., 2010)
- Provider-patient visits are interactive and reciprocal, requiring engaged and competent communicators on both sides (Parker et al., 2005)
- Communication training can empower patients to overcome a variety of challenges:
  - Missed empathic opportunities (Pollak et al., 2007)
  - Racial/ethnic communication disparities (Ashton et al., 2003)
  - EMR competing for attention (Asan, Smith & Montague, 2014)
- Benefits of active patient participation:
  - Satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Robinson et al., 2005)
- Previous reviews are either outdated (Harrington, Noble & Newman, 2004) or topical (Bylund et al., 2010)

Objectives

- To conduct a systematic review of patient communication training research
- Systematic literature searches (Sep 28, 2015 and Sep 16, 2016) were conducted in six databases: MEDLINE (via PubMed); Embase; The Cochrane Library; Web of Science; PsycINFO (via OVID); and ERIC
- Publications were selected for review by consensus among two authors (3rd author arbitrating as needed)
- Extracted data included intervention study design, sample characteristics, content and structure of training, outcomes assessed and findings reported

Methods

- Systematic review was conducted using PRISMA flow chart
- Nineteen studies were included in the final analysis
- Summary of included studies

Results

- Most frequently targeted primary care (n = 16) or cancer patients (n = 9) and used a randomized controlled design (n = 19)
- Training formats: materials only (n = 13); materials plus individual coaching (n = 13); and group-based (n = 6)
- Delivered immediately pre-visit (n = 17), targeted multiple skill categories (n = 31) and lasted ≤ 1 hr (n = 16)
- Eight of ten studies that assessed total level of active participation found a significant effect; Findings were mixed for individual behavior categories
- Six of seven studies that evaluated visit duration found no training effect
- Seven of ten studies found that trained patients exchanged significantly more information with their providers
- Little evidence of link between communication training and improved health, psychosocial wellbeing, or treatment-related outcomes

Conclusions & Future Directions

- Communication training is a useful approach to increase patients’ total level of active participation in healthcare interactions
- Some communication behaviors may be more amenable to training (e.g., expressing concerns)
- Additional research is needed to determine the most efficacious training programs with the strongest potential for dissemination

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