Teach–back technique

Improving communication | Improving patient safety
Improving self management | Improving health literacy

Clear communication is essential for effective healthcare relationships and patient safety. Yet patients remember and understand less than half of the information they are given.

Poor understanding can lead to serious health problems.

Simply asking ‘is that clear?’ or ‘have you understood everything?’ doesn’t work.

Use teach-back, it’s an easy and effective way to check patient’s understanding.
Teach-back is a really simple way to check patient’s understanding.

It involves asking patients to explain or demonstrate, in their own words, what you’ve discussed with them – for example:

‘To be sure I’ve explained this consent form clearly, can you tell me what you are agreeing to?’

Or

‘Please show me how you will use the asthma inhaler, so I can be sure I have given you clear instructions.’

Or

‘We discussed a lot today. Can you tell me what you found most important?’

• If patients don’t restate the information correctly, then try explaining again using different words, drawing a diagram or simplifying instructions, then use teach back again.

• If, after two or three attempts, the patient still does not “get it,” then ask a colleague for help or look for another explanation such as the need for an interpreter.

Further copies of this postcard are available from: knowledge@nes.scot.nhs.uk

This postcard is based on information from the American Medical Association, www.ama-assn.org
May 2011