



# Training patients to ask information verifying questions in medical interviews

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patients to ask  
questions

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Received 1 January 2005  
Accepted 1 May 2005

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The main purpose of the paper was to examine whether a short patient training session on various ways of requesting physicians to clarify a piece of previously elicited information during medical consultation would improve information communication, thus increasing patient satisfaction.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A total of 114 adult patients voluntarily participated in the study which was carried out at a clinic in Canada. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the experimental group and half to the control group. Males and females were evenly distributed in both experimental and control groups. Prior to their medical visits, participants in the experimental group received 10-15-minute face-to-face training, whereas the control group did not receive any training. The purpose of the training was to facilitate information transmission, with the intention to increase communication effectiveness and patient satisfaction. Immediately after their medical visits, all participants filled out a patient satisfaction questionnaire.

**Findings** – On all four dimensions of patient satisfaction (i.e. overall satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, communication satisfaction and expertise satisfaction), patients who received training scored significantly higher (were more satisfied) than patients who received no training. No consistent gender differences were found in patient satisfaction in both experimental and control groups.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study applied a psycholinguistics theory, conversational grounding, to the field of patient education and achieved positive results.

**Practical implications** – The success of the short training session provides health practitioners with a new method to help patients communicate more effectively, thus increasing satisfaction in medical interviews.

**Originality/value** – Focuses on a means to elicit information from patients in medical consultations.

**Keywords** Patients, Canada, Customer satisfaction, Interviews, Communication processes

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Butow *et al.* (1994) identified three types of patient communication skill training: information seeking (Robinson and Whitfield, 1985; Roter, 1977; Socha and Cegala, 1998; Thompson and Nanni, 1990), information provision (Fredrikson and Bull, 1995; Lewis *et al.*, 1991; Weinman, 1996), and information verifying (Anderson *et al.*, 1987; Cegala *et al.*, 2000; Kim *et al.*, 2003). The third type of patient training greatly contributes to the success of physician-patient communication but it has received little attention in the



Authorship for this paper is in alphabetical order, therefore, equally shared. The authors would like to thank Dr Garry Knoll and Dr Galt Wilson, for support; the receptionists, for help; and the physicians and patients, for their time and efforts in making this study possible.