

## Enhance Your Telecommunication Skills

COVID-19 will put more focus on **optimizing communication with patients when you're not physically face-to-face**.

The pandemic will accelerate "telepharmacy"...providing care remotely via phone, video, or other technology.

But it also highlights challenges...such as muffled speaking due to wearing masks and not being able to pick up on body language.

Use these tips to enhance your interactions and limit errors.

Involve your techs and students. For example, they can start a call and verify info, remind patients to collect all meds for a comprehensive med review (CMR), and pull up documentation forms.

Limit distractions and background noise. Explain goals of the discussion up front...and consider using a checklist as a guide.

Treat these discussions like an in-person visit...and show empathy with good "websites" manner. For instance, look directly into the camera if on video...and let patients "hear" you smile on the phone.

Continue to ask open-ended questions...then probe for details.

Use specific words to replace visual cues. For example, say, "Tell me each step you take to use the purple inhaler."

Speak slowly, clearly, and loudly if needed...especially if you're wearing a mask. Use plain language and avoid medical jargon.

Give verbal "nods," such as "I see," and explain what you're doing if you need to review patient data or take notes...so patients don't interpret silence as disinterest.

And allow patients time to digest things...and ask questions.

Practice active listening...connection issues may cause you to talk over the patient or miss a key point. Stay alert for changes in tone or unexpected pauses...these could be signs of confusion.

Use the "chunk and check" method. Break down info into short "chunks"...to avoid overload. Then have patients teach back what they've learned and summarize takeaways...to "check" understanding.

Close the discussion by outlining next steps...such as when you'll follow up, contact a prescriber, or mail a med list.

Go to our resource, *Telepharmacy: Tips for Connecting With Patients*, for step-by-step reminders to optimize communication.

### Key References:

-ISMP Med Safety Alert! Community/Ambul Care 2020;19(3):1-4

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