**Measuring How Well Patients with Colorectal Cancer and Their Doctors Communicate**

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**What was the research about?**

Patients are often more satisfied with care when it matches their goals. To provide care that matches what matters to patients, doctors and other clinical staff need to communicate well with patients so they can learn about their needs and concerns. Healthcare organizations can use patient surveys to measure how well clinicians communicate with patients. To be useful, a survey needs to be:

- Valid, or correctly capturing how well doctors communicate
- Reliable, or getting the same results over time

In this study, the research team created and tested a survey for patients getting care for colorectal cancer that asked about communication between the patient and their care team.

**What were the results?**

The research team developed survey questions on six aspects of communication that the National Cancer Institute has identified as important:

- Exchanging information, such as how often doctors ask patients about their concerns
- Supporting healing relationships, such as whether doctors and patients develop a trusting relationship
- Making decisions, such as how well doctors involve patients in choosing treatment
- Responding to emotions, such as how well doctors show concern for patients’ feelings
- Enabling patient self-management, such as how well doctors help patients learn ways to take care of themselves
- Managing uncertainty, such as how well doctors explain how symptoms may change

The research team created two versions of the survey. One version asked 36 questions, while a shorter version asked 6 questions, one for each of the topics. Both versions gave valid and reliable information about patient-doctor communication.

**Who was in the study?**

The research team tested questions with 17 patients with colorectal cancer. Then, the team sent the long version of the survey to 501 patients in North Carolina. Of these patients, 81 percent were white, 14 percent were black, and 5 percent were another race. Patients were age 21 or older, had a recent colorectal cancer diagnosis, and could read and write in English. The average age was 67, and 51 percent were women. Two months later, 360 of these patients filled out a follow-up survey.
**What did the research team do?**

Before the study, the research team looked at other studies about how well doctors communicate with patients. They also watched patients talking with their doctors and interviewed patients with colorectal cancer. The team used this information to create survey questions.

Then the research team asked 17 patients with colorectal cancer to read and answer a set of questions. The team changed or removed survey questions that weren't clear.

Next the research team tested the survey with 501 patients with colorectal cancer. They looked at which questions best measured each aspect of communication. The team also tested whether both the long and short versions of the survey came up with consistent results when used many times.

Patient advocates and doctors were part of the research team and gave input on the survey.

**What were the limits of the study?**

The research team tested the survey only with colorectal cancer patients. Also, the team tested the survey only with English speakers. The results may differ for patients who speak other languages. Future studies could test similar surveys with patients with other cancer types and different health problems.

**How can people use the results?**

Healthcare organizations can use the survey to understand how well doctors communicate with their patients with colorectal cancer and to help them improve.

*To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/McCormack164.*