Trust Is a 2-Way Street: 
Fostering Trust in Patient-Provider Relationships

The emerging evidence related to patient and family engagement highlights a range of significant benefits related to communication and trust. While most research focuses on whether strategies enhance patient trust in their clinicians, providers also need to trust patients.

Doctors often miss the mark on trusting patients’ experience and expertise.

Patients not trusting their providers is often cited as a challenge, yet evidence shows doctors don’t always trust their patients.

- **Believing patients’ pain:** Evidence is clear that providers frequently undertreat pain for women and people of color. For example, a meta-analysis of 20 years of studies found that Black Americans are 22% less likely than white patients to receive any pain medication.¹

- **Taking people’s health concerns seriously:** Women are 7x more likely than men to be misdiagnosed and discharged in the middle of having a heart attack.²

- **Listening to patients:** Clinicians averaged 11 seconds before interrupting patients’ opening comments.³

Effective engagement can bolster patient trust.

- **Clinician question prompts:** A question prompt list helped adolescents ask more questions on managing their asthma and were nearly 5 points more satisfied with their visit.⁴ Compared to the control group, youth in the intervention were 8x more likely to ask questions about asthma triggers.

- **Patient communication preferences:** Patients with serious illness who filled out a form about their communication preferences were more than 2x as likely to discuss and receive care in line with their goals.⁵

- **Decision aids:** Parents of children with head trauma who used a decision aid to select treatment reported increased levels of trust in their doctors.⁶

Trust patients helps clinicians do their jobs better.⁷

- **Better diagnosis:** Patient narratives have demonstrated diagnostic value.

- **Better patient relationships:** Patients need to feel that sharing their vulnerabilities will make a difference in their health and their care — which leads to mutual trust-building.

- **Cultivating clinician joy in practice:** Strengthened patient-provider relationships facilitates a sense of connection and meaning that may help to reduce clinician burnout.

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