

New guide helps providers make effective connection with senior patients

October 15 2012

"[Communicating With Older Adults: An Evidence-Based Review of What Really Works](#)," the latest report from [The Gerontological Society of America](#) (GSA), provides 40 pages of recommended guidelines for health care providers interacting with the fastest growing age segment of America's population.

This publication is intended for physicians, nurses, pharmacists, biologists, psychologists, [social workers](#), caregivers, economists, and health policy experts—anyone who seeks to have the best possible interactions with older patients. It was developed by GSA and supported by [McNeil Consumer Healthcare](#).

"The report is based in the scientific literature, yet the contributors created something extremely accessible," said Jake Harwood, PhD, head of the Advisory Board that crafted the report. "It covers the full range of [communication issues](#) experienced by older adults and [health care providers](#), and gives concrete suggestions for dealing with problems when they arise."

The U.S. Administration on Aging forecasts that nearly one in five Americans will be 65 or older by 2030. At present, those age 65 and above make nearly twice as many physician office visits per year as do adults 45 to 65. According to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), two-thirds of older people are unable to understand the information given to them about their [prescription medications](#).

The report provides 29 specific recommendations in four categories: general tips for improving interactions with older adults, general tips for improving face-to-face communication with older adults, tips for optimizing interactions between [health care professionals](#) and older patients, and tips for communicating with older adults with [dementia](#).

The recommendations were contributed by experts in the fields of [gerontology](#) and communications. Each is accompanied by a brief explanation of the rationale, tips for implementing the recommendation in busy health care settings, and selected references for further reading. The objective is to encourage behaviors that consider the unique abilities and challenges of older adult patients and produce positive, effective interactions among everyone involved.

"The report distills a large body of empirical research findings and scholarship from several disciplines into a set of concrete recommendations for effective communication with older adults," said Advisory Board member Daniel G. Morrow, PhD. "The recommendations include nonverbal and verbal strategies that are often grounded in compelling examples that involve common communication challenges."

Among the specific steps outlined in the report, care providers are encouraged to avoid speech that might be seen as patronizing to an older person, verify listener comprehension during a conversation, and pay close attention to sentence structure when conveying critical information.

"This resource will be of great benefit to health care providers, and would also make good reading for older adults. Increasing awareness of some of these issues among the older population could help them seek more appropriate accommodation when needed," Harwood said.

GSA will distribute the report to its own members, as well as members of the American Geriatrics Society, the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, and the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers.

"While focused on [older adults](#), the recommendations are relevant to communication across the lifespan," Morrow said.

Provided by Gerontological Society of America

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