

New app from UK researcher helps clinician communications

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There's an app for that. A new iOS app developed in part by University of Kentucky researcher Elaine Wittenberg-Lyles will assist health care professionals seeking help communicating with patients during difficult conversations.

The [app](#), "Health Communication: Building Professional Skills," allows quick and ready access to theory-driven and evidence-based [communication](#) tools that are useful in moments of tension, sorrow, fear, anxiety, [awkwardness](#), and hesitancy between [health care professionals](#) and caregivers and patients.

A recent study authored by Wittenberg-Lyles showed that more empathic communication is needed between caregivers and hospice team members. Researchers noted that most caregiver statements were met with biomedical or procedural talk from the hospice team. Few responses went beyond to offer confirmation with a positive remark to the caregiver, and even fewer provided a shared experience to address the caregivers' emotional needs.

"Communication skills training is still relatively underdeveloped in most [health care](#) profession curricula," said Wittenberg-Lyles, who holds a joint appointment with the UK College of Communication and Information and the UK Markey Cancer Center. "Hopefully this app will give clinicians what they need to quickly and immediately address complex yet important conversations that can facilitate patient and family understanding and ease transitions in care."

Wittenberg-Lyles developed the app with the University of Memphis' Joy Goldsmith and the University of Oklahoma's Sandra Ragan, all members of the Clinical Communication Collaborative. The CCC provides free online teaching materials to advance a patient-centered training program called the COMFORT, a communications curriculum based on 10 years of research.

Once downloaded, Health Communication does not require internet access and features more than 100 different [communication strategies](#). Primary features include a quick reference guide for what to say and how to say it, and a communications toolkit that suggests important observations to make, simple ways of identifying health literacy levels, and basic ways to improve team collaboration. Common, yet difficult clinical situations in a variety of contexts (e.g., bad news, decision-making, cancer recurrence) are easy to find, each with a guide that provides you with appropriate questions to ask, what to say, and what to observe.

Health Communication is currently available for free in the iTunes store for iPhones and iPads.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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