

Training Residents and Faculty in Plain Language to Improve Patient-Provider Communication

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Problems

- Residents have difficulty explaining medical concepts to patients in plain language.
- Many patients have low health literacy (40%).¹
- PCMH certification requires patients be screened for health literacy, however, providers were not being trained.

Objective

- To train residents and faculty in health literacy as a universal precaution & teach participants the skill of using plain language when communicating with patients to improve patient understanding.

Methods

- Internal medicine residents (N=85) and clinic preceptors (N=21).
- 14-item Health Literacy Knowledge Assessment.²
- Trained clinic preceptors moderated small group resident discussions.

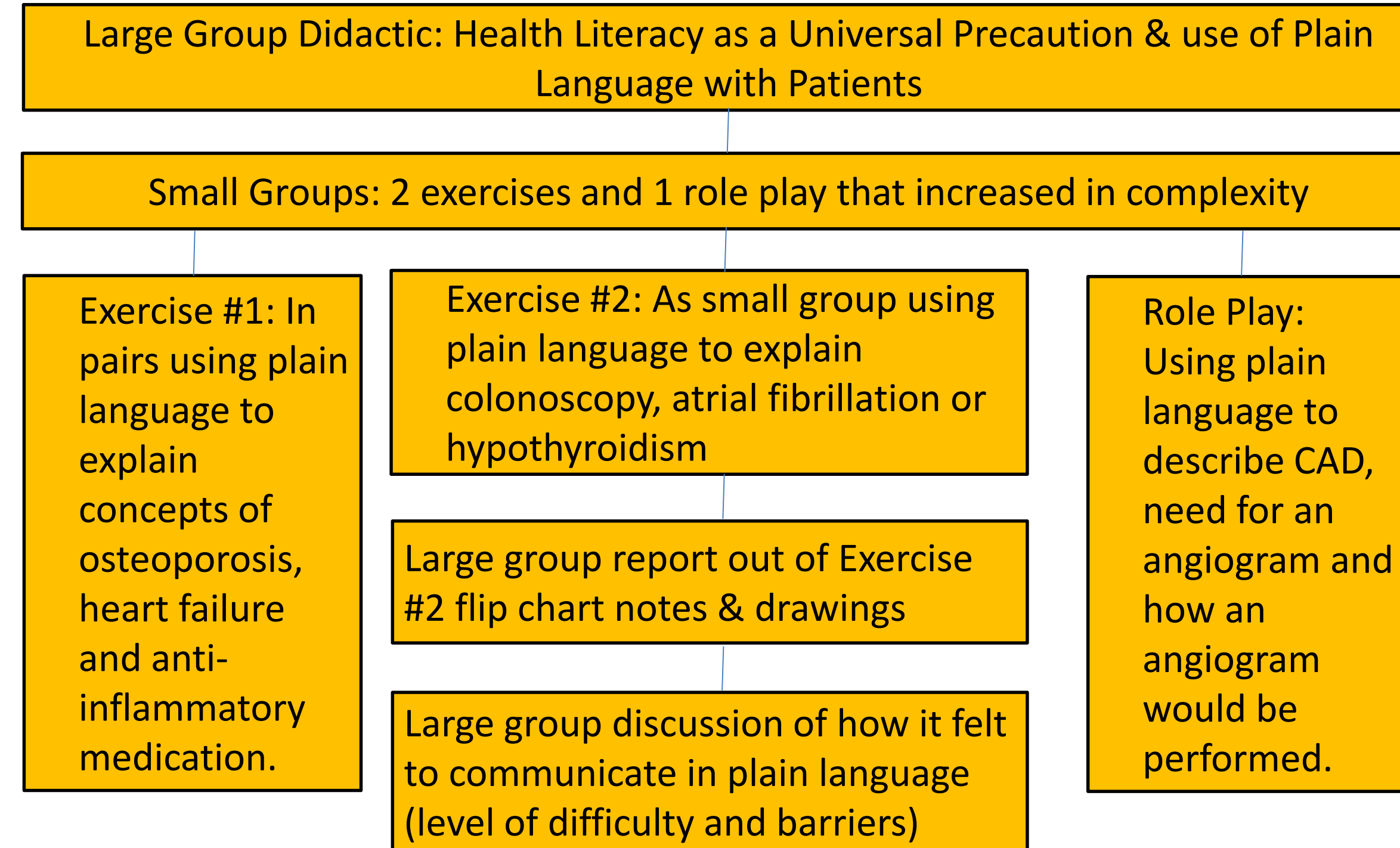
14-item AHRQ Health Literacy Knowledge Assessment (10.3; p-value 0.40)

Training Level	N (%)	Mean % Correct
PGY1	25 (29.4)	10.3
PGY2	32 (37.6)	10.0
PGY3	28 (32.9)	10.7

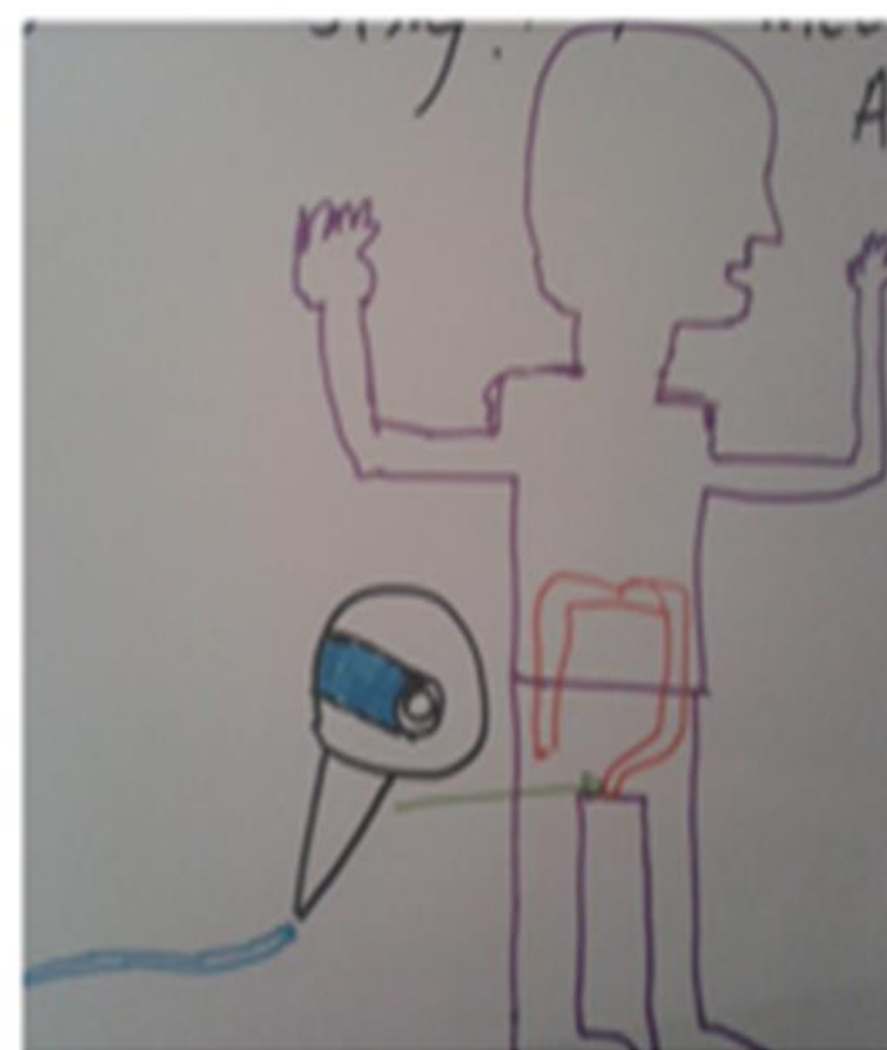
References

- EMR Data analysis, Stroger General Medicine Clinic, 2014 and 2017.
- <https://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>

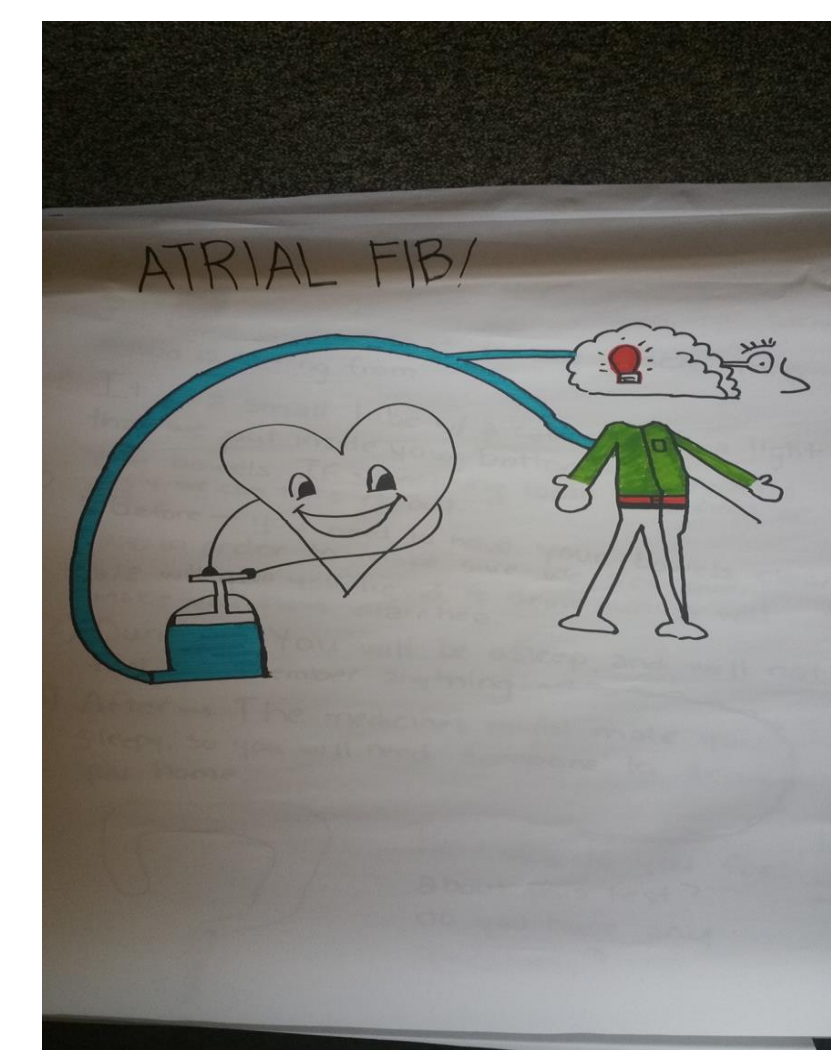
Intervention



Small Group Exercise #2: Use of Drawings to Improve Patient Understanding When Using Plain Language



Colonoscopy



Atrial Fibrillation

Qualitative Reflections Small group exercise #2

- Colonoscopy**
 - Medical term chosen by most groups over atrial fibrillation or hypothyroidism.
 - Plain language terms included “bottom” or “buttocks” instead of rectum or slang; camera on the end of a tube “like my stethoscope” instead of endoscope.
 - Groups felt the need to explain why it was important to have a colonoscopy, the liquid bowel preparation, need for an escort, and sedation to ease patients’ fears.
- Atrial Fibrillation**
 - Plain language terms included “heart seizure,” “beats funny,” “blood gets stranded in the heart” and “when the heart beats irregularly a clot can form.”
 - Residents liked the use of a provider’s hand to mimic the irregular beating of the heart while using plain language.
- Groups felt **drawings** were helpful to explain colonoscopy and atrial fibrillation.
- Hypothyroidism**
 - Plain language terms included “tells your body how fast or slow to work” and “the gland is working less than normal.”

Lessons Learned & Impact

- There was no significant difference in baseline knowledge of health literacy by training level suggesting that all residents could benefit from workshops.
- Participants appreciated time to learn the hands-on skill of using plain language.
- Some international graduates said it was a challenge to use plain language as they learned “medical English” as adults not conversational English.
- “Teach Back” method workshops for faculty & residents conducted Spring, 2017.
- QI project once health literacy workshops completed.
- 50-item plain language thesaurus for use in clinic under construction.
- Health literacy workshops will impact a projected 6800 resident clinic patients, 42,000 faculty clinic patients and innumerable hospitalized patients as internists practice in both environments.