

'He should feel your pain': Patient insights on patient-provider communication in Rwanda

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Background

Patient-provider communication (PPC) is a critical component of health care and can influence patients' health outcomes and well-being. While much research has been conducted on PPC around the world, scientific literature exploring PPC in Sub-Saharan Africa is scarce, scarcer still in Rwanda.

Objectives

To explore patients' communication preferences as well as factors perceived to influence PPC in Primary Health Care settings in Rwanda.

Methods

Qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals, including 8 with limited literacy. A thematic inductive analysis was used.

Results

Patients valued communication with providers and expressed the need for interacting with caring, empathic providers who can share all the information wanted and involve them in their own care. Health literacy and power issues were factors that may influence patient-provider communication. Patients with limited literacy appeared to rely highly on health care providers to make decisions about and manage their health care, but they were also willing to be more involved in their own care.

Conclusion

The expressed preferences, including those of patients with limited literacy, aligned well with the patient-centred care model. Findings call for more inclusion of patient perspectives in the patient-provider encounter. These patients' insights can impact policies and curricula to optimise clinical practice. Strategies for patient empowerment should be part of developing PPC, as should more attention to power issues, health literacy and other factors that may hinder communication. Further training of health professionals and research is also recommended.