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Office Visit: The simple solution

When I was in grade school the good sisters at my Catholic school taught me how to diagram a sentence. The act of diagramming made sentence construction very easy, as you could clearly see the proper place for nouns, verbs, and adjectives. As it turns out in life the simple solution is often disregarded because of the fact it is just that – too simple.

To every complex problem there must be a complex set of answers.

As it turns out, a simple solution to many of our health care woes are staring us in the face. It's called patient literacy.

Apparently, relatively few patients with chronic diseases really understand with any

degree of proficiency the nature of their disease and why their physician describes certain treatments and medications. There's a growing body of research that tells us that when patients truly understand the causes and nature of their disease and the remedies most effective, several good things happen.

First, because they understand the relationship between the disease and the solution, patients are considerably more apt to be compliant with their doctor's instructions. This compliance means they are more assiduous in following the protocols for



STANLEY F. HUPFELD

treatment. This adherence to physician instructions means their opportunity for recovery is quicker and their long-term use of health services is significantly diminished. As a result the overall cost of care across a population of better-informed pa-

tients greatly reduces the cost of their care.

All this raises the question, how do we get enhanced patient literacy? As it turns out the one sure way to achieve a higher level of patient understanding, and therefore compliance, is to reward them. This reward may consist of two elements. First, a

financial award, perhaps by lowering their deductible or co-pay, or in an employer-based plan. There is another more subtle award that also is very effective. Most of us want to please our doctor, and the demonstration of our understanding of our chronic condition and our compliance with our physician's instructions are a sure way of achieving that pleasure. We should not overlook the elegance of simplicity.

Stanley F. Hupfeld is senior consultant, Integris Health. He is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives and the author of Political Malpractice – How the Politicians Made a Mess of Health Reform. He can be contacted at www.stanhupfeld.com.