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Background:

Relationship-centered communication (RCC) is associated with enhanced patient experience, improved medical outcomes and reduced clinician burnout. Despite these recognized benefits, few clinicians receive communication skills training after they enter practice. To improve RCC skills of clinicians practicing at Wake Forest Baptist Health, we launched the Program to Enhance Relationship-Centered Communication (PERCC). Designed in collaboration with the Academy on Communication in Health Care (ACH), PERCC offers 6.25 hour workshops facilitated by a team of eight physician trainers. PERCC attendees work in small groups to practice three RCC skills sets using role-play simulations and focused feedback.

Objectives:

To assess the impact of PERCC on patient experience of physician communication in the ambulatory setting.

Methods:

For physicians with ambulatory practice, we compared the percent of “top box” scores (highest rating) on “quality of provider communication” during the 6 months before with the six months after PERCC attendance using the *Clinician and Group Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems* (CGCAHPS). Physicians who had not attended PERCC served as the control group.

Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to compare pre- and post-PERCC average percent of top-box scores.

Results:

172 physicians with ambulatory practice who attended PERCC had at least 5 CGCAHPS surveys during the 6 months before and the 6 months after the workshop. The percent of “top-box” scores on “physician communication quality” improved after the workshop (91.8 “before” versus 92.7 “after”, $p=0.0004$). Improvement was limited to physicians with pre-workshop scores below the mean ($p\text{-value}=0.0001$). There was a trend for improved scores for PERCC attendees when compared with controls ($p=0.6$). Most attendees rated the impact of the workshop as “moderate to high” on “competence to practice RCC” and “improve patient outcomes”. Over 80% reported that RCC skills enhance “satisfaction in practice”.

Conclusion:

Attendance at a one-day RCC skills workshop was associated with improved patient assessment of physician communication quality. The increase in “top-box” CGCAHPS scores translates into an impressive eight percentile improvement in national comparison data. Further studies will assess educational approaches to sustain clinician use of RCC skills.