



The Art of Consults: Telephone and Letters

José François
MD CCFP Dip Med Ed

October 10, 2009



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA



Disclosure

No conflicts of interest to disclose



Objectives

At the end of this session, the participant should be able to:

- 1) Discuss the importance of good inter-professional communication
- 2) Identify essential elements for effective written and phone consultation
- 3) Utilize tools to improve written communication



Importance of effective communication

- essential for efficient high quality care
- increasingly important as more patient care is done in outpatient setting
- written communication is the most common means by which doctors exchange information pertinent to patient care

(Tattersall et al, 1995)



What some of the
consequences of poor
communication?



Think



Consequences of poor communication

- delayed diagnoses
- repetition of investigations
- increases in health care costs
- poorer patient satisfaction
- poorer provider satisfaction

(Epstein, 1995)



Teaching & learning of communication

- surveys of the communication skills programmes show that written communications seldom form part of focused teaching in health professions' education

(Nestel et al, 2004)

- most Canadian physicians have not received any training or feedback about their letters

(Dojeiji et al, 1997; Lingard et al 2004)



Activity

Imagine you are the consultant who has received the following consult request letter.

What would you want to know?



Dr. A. Smith
River City Medical Centre
222 River Road, River City

Dear Doctor,

Re: Williams, Pat

DOB: 19 June 1956

123 5th Avenue, Springfield

Tel: 204-222-0002

Please see Pat for assessment. Pat is a pleasant 51 year-old with a family history of colon cancer and has recently had an episode of rectal bleeding.

A. Smith



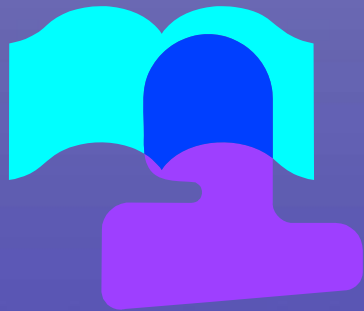
Anatomy of a letter

- demographic data
- initial statement outlining reason for referral
- history of the presenting problem
- past history
- psychosocial history (relevant info only)
- medications
- allergies
- physical findings
- investigations
- clinical impression
- outline expectation(s)



Style

- limit the length of paragraphs to fewer than 5 sentences
- limit the number of words that have more than 3 syllables
- limit yourself to one idea per sentence and one topic per paragraph
- structure letters with the use of headings



Self-study module:

Consult & Referral Request Letters

Self-assessment tool



What are the differences in the consultation process when it occurs on the phone?



Think



Phone consultation tips

- 1) Prepare information before picking up the phone
- 2) Identify yourself, where you are
- 3) Provide relevant summary of problem
- 4) Provide relevant physical findings
- 5) Provide relevant lab data
- 6) Be clear on your expectation of consultant
- 7) Be clear on management plan



After the call

- 1) Document your discussion on patient chart
- 2) Send note and copy of labs with the patient (if he or she is being seen immediately) or a letter to the consultant (if he or she is being seen at a later date)
- 3) If patient being sent to a hospital, contact receiving facility



Questions?

Comments?