



## Letter to the Editor

### Preventive Care Education by Physicians: A Call for Action

Sir:

As part of a non-profit health coalition, a diabetes task force was developed to collect information that would assist in developing a more effective care management system in the community. Uninsured patients with at least one hospital admission in the previous year were interviewed. Although 96% stated that they had a regular doctor, nearly one-third reported they had *never* received any education from their physician. Interestingly, diabetes education received the lowest satisfaction ratings in response to questions about physician services. We presented our study findings to area physicians, who replied, adamantly, that they do provide ongoing education to their patients. If patients do not perceive that they are receiving education, however, then the health care provider's perceptions are meaningless.

The physicians may be offering information that is too complex, or their approach may be too didactic. Any pamphlets or other educational materials they distribute may be inappropriate for the patients' levels of functional health literacy (Williams *et al.*, 1998). Our surveyed patients were indigent, with little education (nearly half had not completed high school). Whatever may be the source of the "miscommunication" during the patient-physician exchange, if patients do not recognize the counseling we offer as education, then we have not educated them.

In conclusion, in improving office-based preventive care, there is a need to evaluate physician counseling techniques so that more patients are truly educated, and we need to be sure that we are doing a good job of preparing future graduates for being effective educators of their patients.

### Reference

WILLIAMS, M.V., BAKER, D.W., PARKER, R.M. & NURSS, J.R. (1998). Relationship of functional health literacy to patients' knowledge of their chronic disease: a study of patients with hypertension and diabetes. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 158, 166-172.

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