

Trouble with the Caregiver - Patient Connection

As we and hopefully you have learned through attending and reading about what went on at TEDMED and NeoCon this year, the future of healthcare is very bright – and there are brilliant thinkers and problem solvers working on making things better every day. The technological advances they are creating are truly breathtaking. As technology becomes more pervasive throughout the healthcare experience, opportunities for better care increase, but also new obstacles arise, challenging the patient and caregiver connection we at Steelcase Health care so deeply about.

There are two important connections as healthcare continues to evolve: the connection between caregivers and patients, and the connection between people and technology. With the delivery of healthcare becoming increasingly complicated, the underlying goal is to understand what stands in the way of great connections in healthcare environments and create solutions that support a better healing experience for everyone.

Through our research, we've noticed several barriers to these connections that prevent the new technologies, in particular tablet computers like Apple's iPad, from being used to their full potential, which then can make it more challenging for the patient and caregiver to develop a strong connection.

Tune in next Thursday for a discussion of how new technologies, the iPad in particular, can help improve healthcare outcomes. For now, we will focus on the problem at hand – issues damaging the connection between caregivers and their patients.

A major issue we have noticed involves a physical barrier to connection. Current technology and room layout often place obstacles between patients and caregivers, causing the caregiver to turn their back on the patient, or have to lean around something to maintain the appropriate eye contact. This interference with the necessary caregiver-patient eye-to-eye connection can imply caregiver indifference, something that is unintended but nearly inevitable in certain situations.

Also, the distance between the patient and screen can make it hard to see and understand vital information, especially for elderly patients. In many cases, patients and family members are forced into strained viewing positions. Other times, due to the difficulty in transferring information, some information may be skipped and not shared at all.

In order to compensate for these poor sight lines and long distance screens, caregivers sometimes put themselves into physically uncomfortable positions to try to best connect with their patients. They bend, kneel, and stretch in order to simply use their computers or tablets, or to create better technology viewing angles, but this is not a great solution to their connection problem. The results are uncomfortable, disjointed interactions and the potential for injury over time. We've talked before about workplace injuries, especially in the nursing community, and how debilitating and alarmingly common they are. An injured or rundown caregiver is not a highly effective caregiver, and this slip in performance does not bode well for their patients.

Luckily these problems are fixable – mobile technology and tablet computers like the iPad are making life easier for caregivers and patients alike, by helping them to share information in a simpler manner. Tune in next Thursday for some examples of how iPads are making the world of healthcare a better place.

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