words are powerful.

A truly conscientious selection of words can make an impact on the acceptance and effectiveness of your healthcare communications.

*This is part of an on-line video course on how to improve patient satisfaction available at www.PHC.thebigknow.com – Connecting with the Health Care Consumer.
Procter & Gamble Personal Health Care conducted research on what are appropriate and relevant word choices for use in healthcare communications.

**words to use**

**caring**
The healthcare professional demonstrates responsibility, offers straight answers, shows empathy, and gives patients the desired attention.

**listen**
The healthcare professional follows up with probing questions and offers options that are available when describing a condition. He/she also recognizes patients’ knowledge and treats patients with respect.

**well-being**
The healthcare professional helps me “get back to normal” and provides specific directions, answers or solutions for the patient’s condition.

**respect**
This word can be perceived in two ways: respect for the healthcare professional (recognition for his or her knowledge) and respect for the patient (the healthcare professional is honest, provides advice and acknowledges their concerns as being important).

**confidence**
Patients view “confidence” as closely aligned to satisfaction with the healthcare professional. Also, confidence does not exist without the healthcare professional listening to and showing respect for the patient.

**words to lose**

**take your medicine**
Patients can perceive this phrase as insulting and demeaning if the patient understands why he or she is taking the medicine and does not need a reminder to take it.

**consequences**
Patients can view this word as “bad things will happen” or that there is a price to be paid and it was probably the patient’s fault.

*Focus on the positive and help patients to understand the benefits of following advice.*

**restore**
Patients can understand this word to mean “restoring health to the way it used to be,” which they feel is unrealistic since “we all are going to age.”

*A better approach might be to use words like; feel better or improve.*

**change**
Patients perceive “change” as a neutral or negative word but view it to mean something incumbent upon them (i.e., requiring change from them).

*Providing options or choices can help patients to make ‘changes’ needed to improve health.*

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