

Patient-Led Physician Education Program About Tourette Syndrome

What is the research about?

Over the last few years, there have been calls to change the way medicine is practised. In some places, traditional doctor-focused, diseased-centered, and prescriptive medical practice is now being replaced with a more empathetic, collaborative, and patient-centered approach. To be effective, it means that doctors need to be emotionally involved with and interested in the unique experiences of their patients. This change is being made in the hope of improving the quality of the patient-physician relationship and thus, treatment success.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers asked teenagers and young adults with Tourette Syndrome (TS) to act as patient educators for 79 physicians from 5 American hospitals. These patient educators described their own personal experiences with TS to the physicians during presentations. They described their journey from symptom onset to diagnosis, current and previous medications and treatments, and examples of encounters they had had with medical professionals. To see if these presentations had any effect on the physicians, information was collected from the physicians before and after the presentations, to measure any changes in their empathy. Comments from the physicians were solicited, to explore any other effects that the presentations might have had on them.

What did the researchers find?

Responses to the tests of empathy showed that the participating physicians did have a more empathetic view of the presenters, their conditions, and their situations following the presentations. Additionally, the comments collected from the physicians formed three themes. The first, “medical knowledge of TS”, suggested that the presentations improved the physicians’ understanding of TS. The second theme was “empathy for patients,” in which the participants highlighted their belief that physicians must learn to connect with their patients as unique individuals. Lastly, the “supportive resources for patients” theme showed an understanding by physicians of the need for wide-ranging supports for their patients.

Take home message

This study suggested that patient-led physician education may be a significant and useful addition to medical education. The increase in physicians’ empathy for patients, medical knowledge of conditions, and awareness of the need for all-inclusive patient care showed that such presentations have the potential to influence patient care across medical fields.

*NOTE: This [Research Report](#) was written by K. L. Graham and colleagues, and was published in *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*. 2014.*