

TeleHealth Services Patient Engagement and Education Blog

May 30, 2019

The Secret Behind Changing Patient Behavior: Achieving the A-HA!

By: Jim Stratos

Client Outcomes Manager, TeleHealth Services

Let's face it – behavior change is tough!

But it's often good for you and sometimes necessary. Unfortunately, that doesn't always make it easier to go through the motions of behavior change. Doing so challenges what you know and takes you outside of your comfort zone. It can be even tougher if you're unaware that your behavior isn't producing the best results.

When you think about it, why would you want to change something that always seems to have worked and doesn't require too much active thinking to accomplish?

Why try to fix what you perceive isn't broken in the first place?

As a certified personal trainer, I can't help but notice whether or not my fellow gym-goers are performing exercises properly. Knowing that the right form will bring optimal results for the efforts and prevent injuries, I'm happy to help whenever I see someone who needs a little work on their exercise techniques. One morning at the gym, I noticed one of the other regulars working out on the abdominal crunch machine and noticed he wasn't getting much out of the exercise. Rather than telling him he was doing it wrong—which can typically put a person on the defensive—I asked him whether he was happy with the results. “Not really,” he said without much thought. I asked him if he'd like to see a better method of using the machine that would offer him much greater impact and results. He accepted my offer with enthusiasm. I showed him the proper form and then let him try it for himself.

“That's amazing,” he told me. “I didn't realize I was doing the exercise the wrong way all this time. This is going to make a huge difference.” The results he'd been seeking were eluding him, but he could tell that this minor change that I'd shared with him had put him on track to success.

Why did it work? I gained his acceptance that his technique wasn't working and showed him a better way to meet his goals. This approach can help anyone, in any situation, change their behavior.

As a Client Outcomes Manager for hospitals with interactive patient engagement systems, I assist clinicians with using technology to educate their patients. I often find myself face to face with nurses in hospitals who feel discouraged when the topic of behavior change comes up, particularly in the context of chronic disease patients.

“Some patients just come back again and again,” a nurse told me recently. “I'm caring for a COPD patient right now who just can't seem to stay out of our unit. I provide the same standard education to her every single time but it just doesn't seem to stick.”

That certainly sounded familiar. It made me think of my friend at the gym who kept going back to the crunch machine every day even though he wasn't getting the abs he wanted. The effort was there, but the results were lacking.

Patient education expert Fran London gives some good advice for this situation: “Respond to non-adherence with assessment. The key to improving outcomes through patient education is to involve the learner.”

I chatted with the nurse and shared how I approach behavior change as a personal trainer. She pondered it for a moment and told me that next time, before she launched into the routine patient education for the diagnosis, she would first ask the patient what her goal is. Then she would ask her what she's been doing to achieve it, and if she was happy with the results.



I caught up with the nurse at a later time when she told me that the whole experience had pleasantly surprised her. The nurse did ask the patient about her goals and in the patient's own words – she just wanted to breathe better and go home!

“Take your meds!” had been one of the strongest messages the patient was hearing from her doctor and nurses. She'd been trying, but wasn't getting the results she wanted. The patient was on several different medications and some of the pills looked alike, so she had a hard time telling them apart. She was also prescribed two different inhalers but had a tough time using them. Not only was it hard to deeply breathe the medicine in, but she had arthritis in her hands, which made it difficult to compress the devices.

The nurse was amazed at what she learned from that conversation. With this new information from the patient, she was able to better focus her education with some videos specific to the patient's inhalers, as well as some new education on her arthritis. She also had a pharmacist stop by the patient's room to give the patient some medication counseling, a medi planner, and a couple of demonstration inhalers so she could practice using them throughout her hospital stay.

“So many ‘A-HA’ moments happened for this patient,” said the nurse. “Every new little thing she learned was adding up to big changes.” The results spoke for themselves. The patient's confidence level had improved greatly at the time of discharge. Several weeks had passed and she hadn't been readmitted.

Behavior change is tough – not impossible! We are creatures of habit and change takes a lot of work, but we are much more likely to achieve goals that we set for ourselves than goals that others set for us. In the gym, the hospital, or in any other situation in life, we can help others change behavior by assessing their goals and gauging how happy they are with their current results. Once they take ownership of the work they must do to meet their goals, the education and support we provide will be invaluable in helping them to achieve better results.

ABOUT Jim Stratos



Jim Stratos joined the TeleHealth Services Client Outcomes team in March 2017. For more than 25 years he has been a relationship manager and technology solution provider to the healthcare industry. As an ACE certified personal trainer and functional movement specialist, he has unique insights into helping clinical teams identify and address barriers to behavior change

in order to better realize their targeted outcomes. Jim's passion is helping his clients explore creative ways to use technology to address challenges and achieve goals. He serves TeleHealth clients in NJ, NY, and PA, and the New England area in their efforts to reduce readmissions and improve patient satisfaction and outcomes.

ABOUT TeleHealth Services

TeleHealth Services is leading the charge in patient engagement, providing hospitals a full range of interactive patient care technologies. These solutions allow hospitals to easily deliver patient-specific education and facilitate the exchange of clinical and non-clinical information for a variety of needs. Patients, families, and clinicians are responding positively to these efforts to better engage patients in their own recovery. Comprehensive patient education and care plan management tools also help reduce readmissions, improve outcomes, increase workflow efficiencies and enhance overall patient satisfaction.