

A Clear Language Is Essential: A Qualitative Exploration of Doctor-Patient Health Interaction in Jordan

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Abstract : When doctors and patients do not share the same first language, language barriers may exist, which may have negative effects on the quality of communication and care provided. Doctors' use of medical jargon and patients' inability to fully express their illness, to a potential loss of relevant information can often create misunderstanding. This study sought to examine the extent to which a lack of "common" language represents one of the linguistic obstacles that may adversely influence the quality of healthcare services in Jordan. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was used to interpret the phenomena under study. Doctors (n=9) and patients (n=18) were observed and interviewed in natural Jordanian medical settings. A thematic qualitative approach was employed to analyse the data. The preliminary findings of the study revealed that most doctors appeared to have a good sense of appropriate ways to break through communication barriers by changing medical terminologies or jargons into lay terms. However, for some, there were two main challenges: 1) the use of medical jargon in explaining medication and side effects and 2) the lack of patients' knowledge in providing a full explanation about their illnesses. The study revealed that language barriers adversely affect health outcomes for patients with limited fluency in the English language. It argues that it is doctors' responsibility to guarantee mutual understanding, educate patients on their condition and improve their health outcomes.

Keywords : communication accommodation theory, doctor-patient interaction, language barrier, medical jargon, misunderstanding

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