



The New 3Rs **ADVOCATE**

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A newsletter for New 3Rs Advocates in action!

WHAT'S UP DOC?

TEENS & HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNICATION

Naomi has been anxiously waiting 45 minutes in the exam room, draped in a paper gown. She's meeting this doctor for the first time. She feels nervous and awkward - unsure of how she will be treated when she mentions her fear about having "gotten something" after hooking up with someone she just met at a friend's party. Naomi is fifteen, and this was her first sexual experience. She's embarrassed, but she has some questions she wants to ask about the differences between safe and unsafe sex.

The doctor walks into the room reading a chart, not looking up to greet Naomi. Immediately Naomi feels put off, but can't explain why. This is her doctor - a professional, right? So when asked about the reason for her visit, why does Naomi feel like running out of the room? Could it be the look on her doctor's face? Or was it the way she ran down her list of overwhelming and really personal questions?

Once her exam is over, Naomi wonders if her visit will be confidential. What if her mom calls... will she be told? Naomi would have liked more time and wished she felt more comfortable asking questions, but she assumes this is what you can expect when you're young and need sexual health services.

Many teens share Naomi's concerns and fears. And while her clinic experience was technically sound, sometimes it's the subtle, less medical aspects of the interaction that matter most to a patient.

Doctors, nurses, and frontline clinic staff have a unique opportunity to communicate with teens about sexual health issues. Unfortunately, few providers raise sexual health-related issues unless it is the specific reason for the visit. In a national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Seventeen magazine, less than one in four teens reported ever having discussed his or her sexual history with a doctor or health care provider, and less than a third had discussed birth control or received advice about STI testing, instructions on proper condom use, or counseling about sexual assault or abuse.

Practitioners need to be competent and confident in screening and counseling their teenage patients while also helping young people feel supported and safe when discussing sexual health information. Furthermore, teenagers are best equipped to offer providers accurate and authentic insight into their experiences, concerns, and preferences relating to sexual health care - yet rarely are they given the opportunity to share that.

In an effort to bridge this gap, Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Oregon (PPSO) was selected as one of three organizations in the U.S. to receive funding from the National In-



OHSU nursing student Esther Hunter interviews a clinic patient, played by Chelsea Litton



Teens partaking in the AHCCP project work with nursing students at OHSU-Asland.

stitute for Reproductive Health for the Adolescent Health Care Communication Program (AHCCP). The project includes youth-led training for health care providers, designed to improve the delivery of sexual health services to young people. A standardized patient training offers practitioners a simulated clinic experience with the teens, in which the providers take social/sexual histories, assess needs, and discuss medical issues. As a standardized patient, the teens are trained to develop characters who struggle with issues common to their peers, including STI's, sexual orientation, relationships, contraception, pregnancy and drugs and alcohol. In workshops conducted for OHSU nursing students from Southern Oregon University participants enthusiastically expressed the opportunity to practice with teenagers. "I really loved and appreciated the feedback that was given. It helped me see what works and doesn't work with adolescents and how to make them completely comfortable in the interview." Another student shares, "The experience was great, now I don't feel so awkward about discussing difficult topics." And in response to what the most important learning from this experience was, "knowing what teens really think and to be ready for anything!"

In addition to the standardized patient training, teen educators present an interactive session called "Keepin' It Real with Your Patient," designed to inspire health care providers to reflect on the type and quality of health care they offer. The youth talk about confidentiality, attitude, and the types of questions and language that will help teenage patients feel at ease. In its counterpart workshop, "Keepin' It Real with Your Doctor," teen educators inform their peers of their health care rights and how to make the most out of their visit. As young people learn about the confidential services, emotional support, and accurate sexual health information they are entitled to, they become more empowered to seek out the health care they require and deserve.

This exciting project offers teens and health care providers a forum to learn and work together to improve communication, which can have a significant impact on healthcare delivery. Improving adolescent health care better ensures young people's ability to make healthy decisions - now and in the future. For more information about the program in Oregon contact Joanne Alba at joanne.alba@pphssso.org or call (541) 344-1611 x14.

Do you have an idea for the The Advocate E-Newsletter... a story you would like to share or an article you would like to see? Please contact Joanne Alba, New 3Rs Coordinator @ joanne.alba@pphssso.org.

