

Preface

The past few decades have witnessed a remarkable shift in the doctor–patient relationship. Beginning in the late twentieth century, patients began assuming increasingly active roles in their medical care. While shared decision-making and patient-centered care convey benefits, they are not without challenges. The Internet, with a plethora of easily accessible information, contributes to the wave of patients visiting their physicians with preconceived notions of their diagnosis and preferred treatment course. When patients read accurate information from reputable sources, their increased knowledge and understanding expedites the consultation by reducing the time needed for patient education. However, the poor quality of information available to the lay public causes many patients to become misinformed, confused, and fearful. Physicians, compelled to respond accordingly, are then tasked with correcting misconceptions.

Results of research studies, complicated and nuanced by nature, are regularly presented over-broadly or incorrectly on the Internet. Viral Internet content is taken as fact. Basic science research results are commonly presented in the media as if they directly apply to patients. Clinical outcomes studies commonly test differences between large groups of research subjects, limiting the applicability of their conclusions for the individual patient. Without comprehending this context, patients ask their doctors how these recent results will affect their treatment.

In this landscape, clear communication between physicians and their patients is imperative. This book is designed to facilitate conversations about research studies between pediatricians and patients by two means. Part I of the book assists physicians in promoting research literacy among their patients. When patients do not have the research literacy skills needed to discern fact from fiction, confusion and disagreement easily occur. Informed consumers of online content understand basic facts about research and the factors that influence the relevance of a study's findings. These first five chapters explain how patients can easily determine the validity and applicability of the information they encounter online and elsewhere. Because complex concepts are described, these chapters include sample language that pediatricians can use as models for their own explanations to patients. These sections are demarcated with headers, "To Explain to a Patient."

While not suggesting that pediatricians use this language verbatim, the samples provide accurate distillations of the concepts for pediatricians to explain in their own words.

Part II of the book is comprised of research reviews in special topic areas. The authors used their clinical observations of parents' common questions in pediatric health and mental health outpatient settings to select the topics. The nine resulting chapters distill the relevant information to address common parental concerns and misconceptions. Each chapter opens with an overview of the topic. The chapter then discusses common parental concerns, misconceptions, and findings from current research. Because of the constantly unfolding nature of the scientific process, this part of the book is meant to serve solely as a base for pediatricians to hold these conversations. The skills taught in the Part I of the book should be applied to any emerging research findings in these areas.

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