Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

▶ Describe key elements of effective digital communication

▶ Identify tools and techniques for email management

▶ Propose norms for digital communications in your department/workplace

Format: Workshop

- Overview of best practices

- Discussion of applicability in your environment

- Reflect on potential changes – personal and departmental

Discussion

Characteristics of Effective Emails

Characteristics of Frustrating Emails

What we know about email (and other digital communication tools)

- There are an estimated 5.2 billion email accounts; 220 billion emails sent per day

- Healthcare provider use: consults; communicate with patients; collaborate on scholarly projects; perform administrative duties; and conduct routine communication.

- E-mail technology also expands the scope of telemedicine, allowing for remote consultation, radiographic assessment, and patient care

- Digital communication skills are vital.

- Guidelines exist for physician to-patient e-mail use; limited evidence-based guidelines addressing the use of e-mail among healthcare teams.

- Familiarity does not equal professional mastery
  - Easy to blur the lines between personal and professional

"*The total time taken to respond to an email is often MORE than the time it took to create it.*"

- Chris Anderson, the Email Charter, 2018

This phenomenon can be thought of as a potent modern tragedy of the commons. The commons in question here is the world's pool of attention. Email makes it just a little too easy to grab a piece of that attention.

Positives

- Rapid
- Easy to use
- Environmentally friendly
- Inexpensive
- Improves patient care

Challenges

- Too much
- Inefficient for complex cases/discussions
- Mis-matched urgency
- Reduces face-to-face interactions
- Security
- Level of formality

Perception of emails = Perception of sender

▶ Study of 32 Orthopedic Surgery Residents – impressions of emails

▶ The key negatively endorsed features of the e-mails included the use of

  ▶ colored backgrounds (84%), difficult-to-read font (83%), lack of a subject header (55%), opening salutations without recipient names (50%), or no salutation at all (42%).

▶ The senders of negatively endorsed e-mails were perceived by participants as

  ▶ inefficient ($p0.03$), unprofessional ($p\ 0.001$), and irritating ($p\ 0.007$).

▶ E-mails with overall positive endorsements were significantly more likely to have the participants perceive the e-mail senders as

  ▶ Professional ($p\ 0.001$), pleasant ($p\ 0.048$), and kind ($p\ 0.059$).

▶ The participants were 2.6-fold more likely to respond immediately when they perceived e-mails as favorable compared with disliking them (42% vs 16% of responses, respectively, $p\ 0.001$).

Resendes, et al (2012)

So, what do we do?

Solutions/Tips: Writing an email

Strategy	Examples
Useful Subject Lines	• Use clear, meaningful subject lines • Consider subject prefixes/keywords, e.g. [INFO]; [ACTION]; [URGENT] • Remove leading meaningless notation, e.g EXT, FWD, Re:Re:Re • Consider phrases like "EOM" (end of message)
Maximize Readability	• Keep email short – 5 sentences or less • Get to the point immediately • If more information is needed, break into Summary/Details • Avoid background colors, patterns, all capitals, and unusual fonts. • Avoid unnecessary attachments (e.g. logos)
Emphasize Actionable Items	• Do not ask open-ended questions unless necessary – give options • Spell out your need for acknowledgement; if received, acknowledge quickly • Use if… then… statements • Reply to questions clearly (inline, different color, preceded by initials) • Assign tasks specifically • Highlight lack of need to respond (NNTR, FYI)

Solutions/Tips: Writing an email

Strategy	Examples
Say what you mean (and only what you mean)	• Don't send emotionally charged e-mails; consider a direct conversation for complex or sensitive topics. • Transmit protected patient data cautiously • Avoid humor that may be misinterpreted. • Proofread each e-mail for proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Solutions/Tips: Managing your inbox

Strategy	Examples
Limit Access	• Check email episodically during the workday • Avoid or limit email access during non work hours • Write now, send later

"The approach of inbox as to-do-list misprioritizes newer emails as more important and results in missing tasks not captured in emails"
-Armstrong

Solutions: Changing Culture

- Agree on norms/best practices
  - https://tedchris.posthaven.com/help-create-an-email-charter

- Leaders model good email practices
- Reject 24/7 email expectations
- Encourage truly disconnecting
- Reduce unnecessary mass emails

What about other tools?

My team's digital communication

What's working?
What's not working?
What might you want to try to implement?

Group discussion/activity

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