DO CHILDREN AND PARENTS HAVE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES WITH THE SAME PEDIATRICIAN? A COMPARISON OF PARENT AND CHILD RATING OF THE DOCTORS’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Introduction: Physician-parent-child interactions often rely on the parent-physician conversations to make decisions about the child. In pediatric settings, the role of the child in medical conversations is important yet the opinions of the child are rarely solicited. This longitudinal study sought to compare parent-child rating of a doctor’s communication skills and how that changed over time.

Methods: Mother-daughter pairs were recruited and trained as standardized patients to participate in two scenarios (exercise induced asthma and the onset of diabetes). The children (8–12 years-old) portrayed a 12-year-old patient. The mother and child evaluated the medical student’s communication skills using a 10-item instrument adapted from the ABIM patient satisfaction instrument. Descriptive and multivariate analyses were conducted. Additionally, a communication direction analysis was done by four trained coders on 30 randomly selected videos to determine how that affected mother-child ratings of the medical student. Finally, a textual analysis of comments was done to identify issues that may affect the parent-child rating of the doctor’s communication skills. A total of 406 medical students participated over three years (2006–2009).

Results: The scores were generally skewed towards favorable ratings. The children rated the medical students significantly higher than the mothers on four items: the doctor’s perceived confidence (p < .0005), being treated with respect (p = 0.001), not feeling judged (p = 0.03) and the doctor not interrupting the conversation (p = 0.01). The communication direction analysis indicated no significant difference in mother-child ratings although the conversation was largely directed at the child. The themes that emerged from the textual analysis were: the need to use appropriate terminology with children, the need to balance the conversation between parent and child, and the need to demonstrate confidence. Although the children rated the doctors higher than parents, the child ratings of the doctors had significantly decreased (p < .05) and were closer to the parent ratings by year three.

Conclusions: Although there were differences in mother-child rating of the doctor on some aspects of communication skills, there appears to be some parental influence on the child’s perception over a period time.

Reference