

Helping Medical Assistant and Support Staff Talk with Patients about the PHQ-9

PURPOSE

Clinics often ask front desk reception, medical assistants, community health workers and other staff who have not have behavioral health training to interact with patients regarding screening and treatment monitoring for depression and other behavioral health conditions being treated in the clinic.

These staff sometimes feel unprepared to discuss these kinds of sensitive issues with patients and it's important to make sure that they have the support and training they need to feel comfortable with patients. Whether or not clinic staff feel comfortable talking about behavioral health symptoms sends an important message to the patient. It's important to send the message that the clinic, including all of the clinic staff, feel comfortable addressing these conditions and the clinic treats them the same they do any other condition being treated at the clinic.

This tool is designed to help clinic support staff with answers to common questions they may hear from patients to help increase their comfort talking with patients about the PHQ-9. It's best for support staff to have the opportunity to role play these with other clinic staff to give them the opportunity to practice before using them with patients. It can also be helpful for support staff to keep this someplace where they can refer to it, as needed, when they get questions from patients.

Presenting PHQ-9 to Patient

Question	Why do I need to fill this out?
Answer	<p>SCREENING Your provider is interested in how you are feeling. It's like taking your blood pressure or temperature but it's focused on how you've been feeling over the past 2 weeks. We ask these questions for all of our patients because we care about how you're doing in all areas.</p> <p>FOLLOW-UP (<i>already in treatment</i>) Your provider wants to know how you are feeling so that we know if the treatment is working. It's important to measure regularly so that we can change the treatment if it's not working.</p>
Question	I don't have these problems. Why do you want me to fill this out?
Answer	It's like taking your blood pressure or temperature. We check everyone so that we can keep track of how you're feeling over time. If you're concerned about these questions you can talk with your provider about it.
Question	Do I have to fill this out even if I'm not comfortable answering these questions?
Answer	You never have to fill out a form or answer questions that you're not comfortable with. If you're concerned about these questions you can talk with your provider about it.
Question	I would rather just talk to my provider about these questions instead of filling this out. Is that OK?
Answer	Yes, of course.
Question	I don't understand some of these questions. Can you help me?
	If you have questions about the specific items on the form and how they apply to you it would be best to talk about that with your provider.

