

# Patient Attributes and Trust in Physician

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## Abstract

Research has shown that a patient's trust in his/her physician may affect their willingness to follow prescribed medical treatments, and therefore their overall health outcomes (Fiscella, Meldrum, Franks, Shields, Duberstein, McDaniel, Epstein, 2004). The patient-physician relationship is influenced by multiple sources; research has focused on characteristics of the physician (Duberstein, Meldrum, Fiscella, Shields, Epstein, 2007), but the patient's attitude and characteristics are also an essential contributor. A survey outlining the patient-physician relationship focusing on trust was administered to 78 people of various ages via Facebook and email. Using Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), this study examines patient self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), willingness to communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985), the levels of perceived homophily (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975) between the patient and physician, self-disclosure (Wheless, 1978), and trust (Wheless, 1977) in physician. The results will be used to foster a more trusting relationship between patient and physician, therefore enhancing the patient's overall health outcomes.

## Literature Overview

- Trust is a significant predictor of continuity, adherence, and satisfaction during care; higher levels of trust result in high fulfillment with patient-physician relationships and the continued relationship (Thom, Ribisl, Steward, Luke, 1999).
- Physician openness has been associated with how patients rate their physicians (Duberstein, Medrum, Fiscella, Shields, Epstein, 2007).
- Uncertainty Reduction Theory examines how people act and react to each other in order to reduce uncertainties during their first interaction. People tend to become uncomfortable when they are uncertain; therefore, individuals try to predict outcomes in order to reduce that uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

## Methods

### Distribution

- Survey using convenience sample
- Email and Facebook

### Survey Instruments

- Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
  - Ten questions, four point Likert-scale
  - Example: "I feel that I have a good number of qualities."
  - Reliability: Alpha = .91, M = 31.16, SD = 3.66
- Willingness to Communicate Scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985)
  - Twenty questions, seven point Likert-scale
  - Example: "Likeliness to talk with a stranger"
  - Reliability: Alpha = .86, M = 111.35, SD = 14.37
- Homophily Scale (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975)
  - Seven questions (eight with one removed to increase reliability), seven point Likert-scale
  - Example "My physician has a status different from me."
  - Reliability: Alpha = .75, M = 29.68, SD = 6.66
- Self-disclosure Scale (Wheless, 1978)
  - Ten questions, seven point Likert-scale
  - Example: "I do not often talk about myself."
  - Reliability: Alpha: .86, M = 69, SD = 12.29
- Individualized Trust Scale (Wheless, 1977)
  - Ten questions, seven point Likert-scale
  - Example: "My physician is respectful."
  - Reliability: Alpha: .93, M = 90.63, SD = 11.16



## Results

### RQ1a: Is there an association between a patient's trust in a physician and a patient's self-esteem?

- There was a correlation between a patient's trust in their physician and the patient's self-esteem,  $r = .21, p < .05$ .

### RQ1b: Is there an association between a patient's trust in a physician and a patient's willingness to communicate?

- There is no correlation between a patient's trust in their physician and the patient's willingness to communicate.

### RQ1c: Is there an association between a patient's trust in a physician and a patient's perceived level of homophily between themselves and their physician?

- There is no correlation between a patient's trust in their physician and the patient's perceived level of homophily between themselves and their physician.

### RQ1d: Is there an association between a patient's trust in a physician and a patient's willingness to self-disclose?

- There is no correlation between a patient's trust in their physician and the patient's willingness to self-disclose.

### Additional Findings

- A correlation was found between a patient's level of trust in their physician and their frequency of visits with their physician,  $r = .37, p < .01$ .
- There is a correlation between a patient's perceived level of homophily between themselves and their physician, and their level of self-disclosure with their physician,  $r = .32, p < .01$ .
- An association was found between the patient's frequency of visits with their physician and their level of self-disclosure with him/her,  $r = -.27, p < .05$ .
- A t-test showed that patients trusted female physicians more than they trusted male physicians,  $t = -2.35 (67), p < .05$ .

## Implications

- When a physician perceives a patient as having low self-esteem, they should be aware that the patient is less likely to trust them. As a result, physicians should make strategic efforts to build higher levels of trust with their patients.
- While homophily is not associated with trust, it does affect how much patients are willing to self-disclose. Based on this understanding, physicians should make a conscious effort to establish common ground with their patients. This perceived common ground will help foster patients' self-disclosure, allowing the physicians to provide better treatment to the patients.

