

TEACHING VACCINE RECOMMENDATION LANGUAGE IS CRITICAL

Vaccines are one of the most effective global public health interventions in human history, preventing an estimated 154 million premature deaths between 1974 and 2024.¹ However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and with widespread vaccine misinformation, vaccination rates are dropping in the United States.² Even so, the majority of patients will get vaccines if they are recommended, and data show the language of the recommendation matters.³⁻⁵ The language used in vaccine recommendations significantly influences patient decisions. Specifically, presumptive language, which assumes the patient will receive the vaccine, has been shown to increase uptake. Participatory language, which invites discussion, reduces vaccination rates. Many health care providers are unaware of this distinction and often focus on educating learners about vaccine benefits and indications without emphasizing communication strategies.

TRAIN LEARNERS TO BEGIN VACCINE RECOMMENDATIONS WITH PRESUMPTIVE LANGUAGE



You're due for your annual flu shot.

Presumptive Language

- Assumes vaccines will happen
- Implies a strong recommendation
- Increases vaccine uptake



What do you think about getting a flu shot today?

Participatory Language

- Invites debate
- Lacks a clear recommendation
- Decreases vaccine uptake

Presumptive language (ie, announcement approach) for vaccine recommendations increases uptake while participatory language can discourage immunization.³⁻⁵ Many physicians focus resident education on vaccine indications and benefits while neglecting to convey the importance of presumptive language in the initial vaccine message with patients.

HOW TO USE PRESUMPTIVE LANGUAGE

- DO introduce all potential immunization encounters with a brief, *confident* statement that assumes vaccinations will occur (eg, “You are due for the HPV vaccine today to prevent six types of cancer.”)
- AVOID framing the recommendation as optional (eg, “Would you like to discuss vaccines today?”)

Equip learners with evidence-based communication skills by teaching them to use presumptive language to increase vaccination rates.

PRESENTATIONS

A previous iteration of this infographic content was presented as: Bruner LP, Farooq S, Patel S, Bigham J. Giving it our best shot: a stepwise approach to vaccine recommendations to reduce vaccine hesitancy. Lecture-discussion at: 2024 Society of Teachers of Family Medicine Conference on Medical Student Education; February 2024; Atlanta, GA.

CONFLICT DISCLOSURE

Dr Porterfield is an investigator with the Sealy Institute for Vaccine Sciences at the University of Texas Medical Branch. She has served as an investigator on industry-sponsored and government-sponsored clinical trials for vaccines. She has no other competing interests. Dr Bruner inherited stock in several companies that produced vaccines in December 2024 but no longer owns these. Dr Patel has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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