

OpenNotes® Words that Matter: Documentation Tips

UCHealth Epic EHR. 3/2016, by CT Lin MD

NOTE: The following tips are for healthcare providers who are participating in Open Notes, an initiative to share provider documentation with patients online. **Most patients want to see their documentation as it is currently written. If you feel that your patient should not view his/her unedited notes, consider clicking the button for DO NOT SHARE with patient.** HOWEVER, if you wish to consider alternative wording, here are some specific suggestions for discussions that may be challenging.

CONSIDER CHANGING	ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTION
"Highly anxious, drug-addicted /drug-abusing patient..."	"Injection drug using patient..." Note: anxiety, if a key clinical finding, should likely be included.
"Morbidly obese..."	"Has BMI > 30" or "obese per medical criteria" Note: obesity, if important finding, should be included. Studies indicate patients often react positively to thoughtful discussion pointing to its relation to other conditions)
"Patient refuses to take his pills..."	"Patient has been non-adherent to therapy..."
"Stinks of alcohol and clearly intoxicated. This alcoholic clearly caused the accident..."	"Tests positive for alcohol, in setting of car accident..." If true, and discussed with patient, no reason to redact.
"Patient clearly stinks of cigarette smoke..."	"The smell of cigarette smoke is evident on the patient's clothing..."
"Patient is clearly paranoid, but refuses to acknowledge this..."	"Patient and I continue to 'agree to disagree' about his conviction that his apartment is 'bugged.'"
"Patient continues with symptoms of major depression and has had thoughts of suicide..."	If psychologic/psychiatric symptoms and concerns are discussed openly with patient, no reason to redact this from medical documentation.
"14 year old patient has a positive pregnancy test"	Parent proxy access to a minor patient's chart is automatically discontinued at birthday age 14 (standard policy at UCHealth). Also, a provider can uncheck the box for "display note to patient" to hide any specific note.
"Patient was SOB"	"Patient was short of breath" Use EHR auto-correct dictionary tools to automatically expand any commonly used or impenetrable acronyms.
"Patient with narcissistic personality disorder..."	"Patient with axis II personality". Or consider whether documenting personality-type description is important to care of the patient.
"Results of SANE (sexual abuse exam) are..."	Reasonable to uncheck the box to "display note to patient" to hide any specific note.
"Patient with addiction to Internet Porn..."	"We discussed his addictive behavior and reviewed techniques for dealing with it." Slightly less specificity may maintain integrity of the issue without shaming or stigma. Discussion of psychological issues in the setting of medical visits has NOT been of concern over years of Open Notes experience.

"When we think about our patients in a kind of language that WE deem inappropriate or potentially offensive to the uninitiated, who is to say that our own attitudes toward our patients are not affected by that language? Wouldn't we be closer to our patients' experience if we got into the habit of thinking about them in language they would find meaningful and useful?" –Cassandra Cook, PhD, Mental Health, New York