Study finds many patients don't understand their discharge instructions after leaving the hospital

Keeping patients as comfortable and safe as possible following hospitalization is difficult if they aren't receiving appropriate follow-up care after returning home. But a recent study “Readability of discharge summaries: with what level of information are we dismissing our patients?” found that many patients struggle to understand their follow-up care instructions after leaving the hospital.

“Patient discharge notes are written at too advanced of an educational level. To ensure patient comprehension, dismissal notes should be rewritten to a 6th-grade level.”

-Conclusion from the study “Readability of discharge summaries: with what level of information are we dismissing our patients?”

The obvious solution is to work towards writing care instructions that are as simple and clear to understand as possible. In order to help patients clearly understand their follow-up care instructions, the American Medical Association already recommends that written health information be written at a sixth grade reading level.

Providing clear contact information and encouraging patients to call their nurse or doctor with any questions about discharge instructions could also improve the follow-up care patients are receiving.