

5 Tips for requesting stories from patients and caregivers

These are tips for anyone in healthcare who is requesting that a patient or caregiver share their story or experiences in either an informal group setting or a formal speaking environment.

1. Share why you are asking for a story

Why are you asking this person to tell their story? What you are working on or trying to achieve that they can help with? Ask the patient or caregiver for a story that fits with the purpose of your meeting or task.

Ask them what they think is the best of their stories for the task at hand and discuss how that story fits the purpose. It is not enough to say “we just want to hear about your experience.”

2. Select someone who is comfortable telling their story

Have you picked the best person for the group, event and purpose? Are they comfortable telling their story? Look for a person who is a good fit for the group and/or topic. They too will sense if they are a good fit and will be more comfortable.

If the storyteller has a deeply emotional story, what supports might they need when telling the story in public? For example, if they are distressed while telling their story, should you acknowledge their discomfort and give them a safe way out of the room? Discuss it with them. They may be more comfortable knowing there is support and a way out.

3. Provide practical information about audience, timing and format

The storyteller needs to know who the audience is and how many. They need to know when (date/time), how much time they have and where they are in the agenda. They need to know what the format is – panel, keynote, informal within a group, webinar. They need to know if they are expected to create slides and how many and slide format details.

4. Offer support in developing and delivering the story

Some people welcome feedback and the knowledge that the story they provide meets the purpose of the group.

Some people may need technical support for creating a slide show or practice with webinar software or microphones. A rehearsal adds to their comfort level. Not all are comfortable with clickers, microphones or how to advance the slides.

5. Tie the story back to the purpose

When they are telling their story, listen deeply and select the key points that are material to the purpose of the meeting. Validating what you have learned from their story is an important gift back to the storyteller.

Going further, if you can derive action from some of their points, share and discuss this with your group so that the storyteller has the satisfaction of seeing action coming from their sharing. We tell our stories because we want to see change.