



MedStar Health

It's how we **treat people.**

April 3, 2025

Improving Diagnostic Communication and Quality for Older Adults

Alberta Tran PhD, RN, CCRN – Senior Research Scientist

MedStar Institute for Quality and Safety

MedStar Health Research Institute

An older adult vignette

What brings you in today,
Mr. Green?

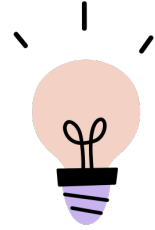


MedStar Health

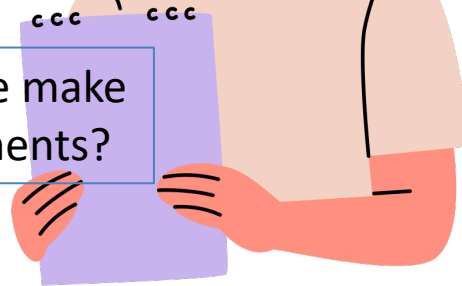
An older adult vignette (continued)

??

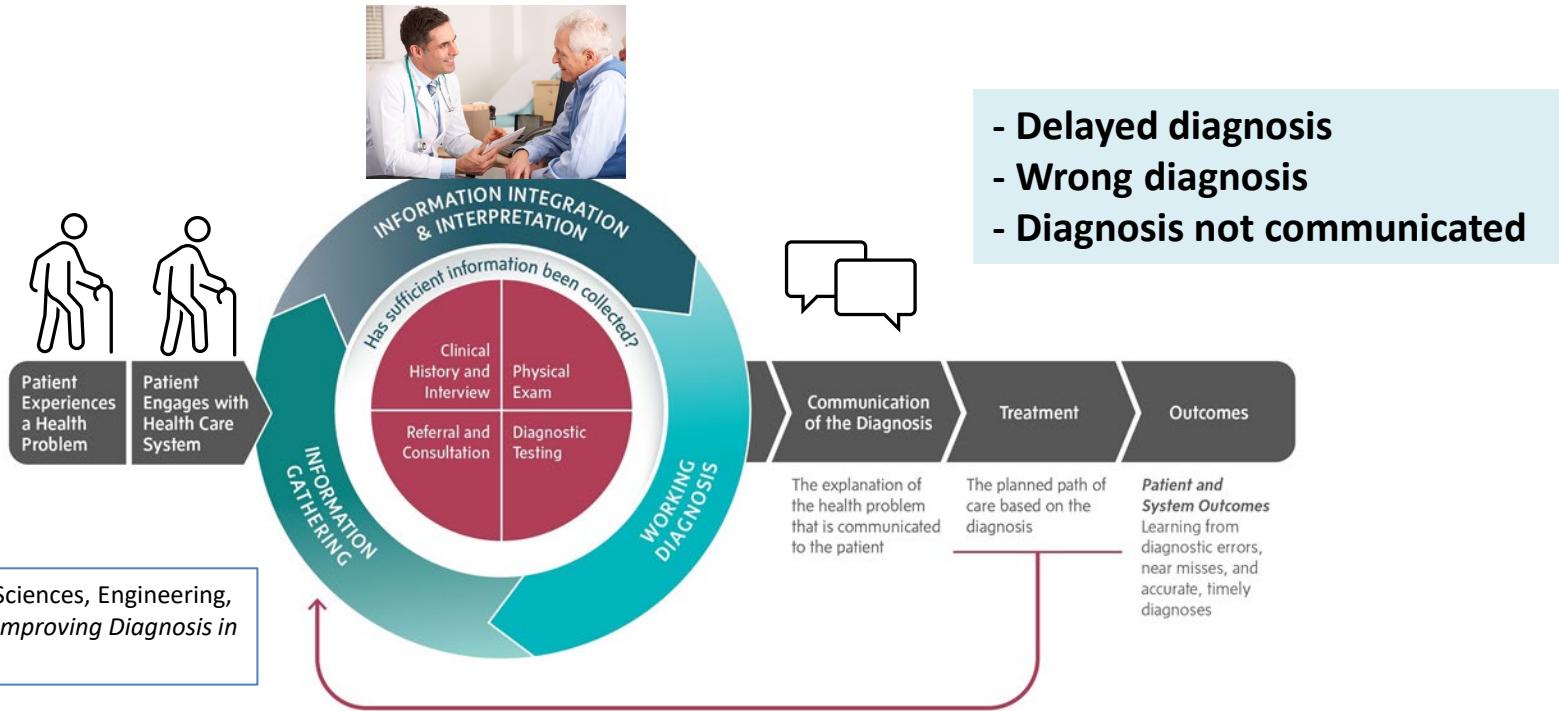
What are some of the diagnostic challenges?



How do we make improvements?



The potential for diagnostic errors



National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2015). *Improving Diagnosis in Health Care*.



MedStar Health

TIME

Older adult diagnostic challenges

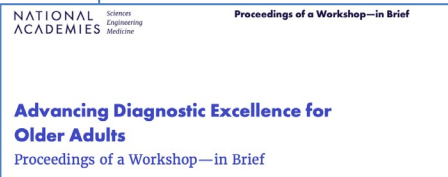
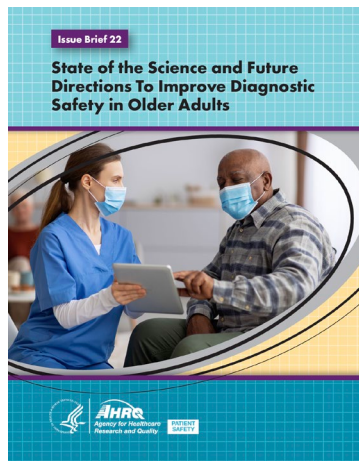
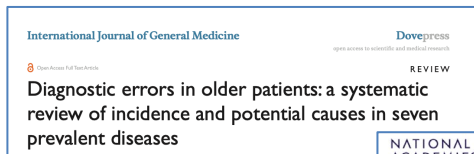
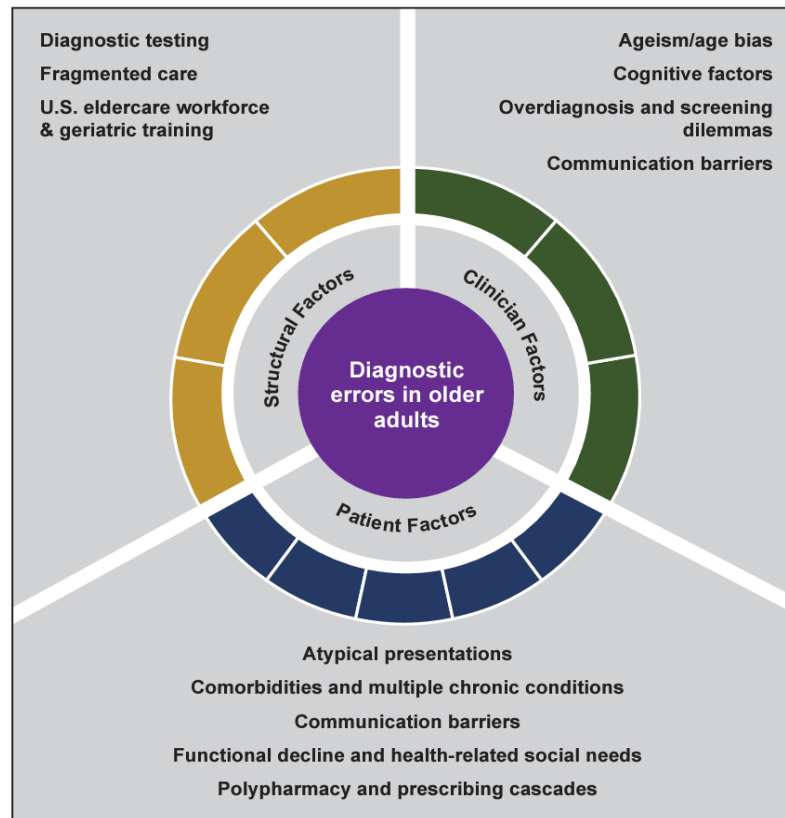


Figure 1. Patient, clinician, and structural factors contributing to diagnostic errors in older adults



Building our own diagnostic safety capacity

Calibrate Dx: A Resource to Improve Diagnostic Decisions

A tool for clinicians to evaluate and improve their own diagnostic decision-making.



Specify the calibration task



Plan and Apply improvement strategies



Evaluate diagnostic performance



Reflect on the exercise and adjust as needed

TeamSTEPPS® for Diagnosis Improvement



Module 1:
Introduction



Module 2: Diagnostic
Team Structure



Module 3:
Communication



Module 4:
Leadership



Module 5: Situation
Monitoring



Module 6: Mutual
Support



Module 7: Putting It
All Together

Measure Dx

Begin and sustain measurement of diagnostic safety.

Measure Dx helps healthcare organizations detect diagnostic safety events and learn from them to gain actionable insights for improvement.



Toolkit for Engaging Patients To Improve Diagnostic Safety



Encourage patients to share their story with the **Be The Expert On You** note sheet



Build a collaborative environment using the **60 Seconds To Improve Diagnostic Safety** strategy

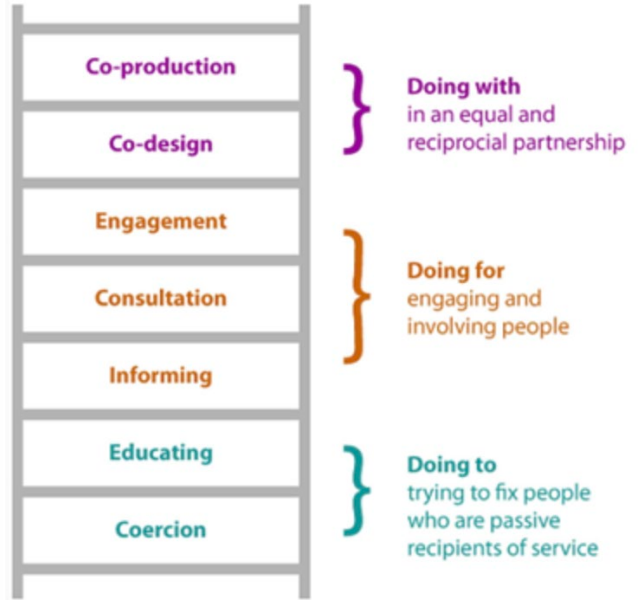


MedStar Health



Agency for Healthcare
Research and Quality

Partnering with patients for better outcomes



“Nothing about me without me”.
– Valerie Billingham, 1998

Epstein et al. (2024). AHRQ Issue Brief: The Patient’s Role in Diagnostic Safety Excellence: From Passive Reception to Co-Design.

Partnering with older adults to improve diagnostic communication

Be the expert on you. Patient Name _____
DOB _____
Date _____

Your provider needs your help to make a safe diagnosis and care plan.
Please answer these five questions before your visit.

Why are you here today?
☐ New problem ☐ Followup ☐ Medicine refill ☐ Something else

Has there been a change in how you are feeling since your last visit?
☐ Yes ☐ No
When did it start? ☐ Days ☐ Weeks ☐ Longer
How does it affect you?

Have you seen anyone else about your health?
☐ Yes ☐ No
Whom did you see?

Do you have questions about...
☐ Medicines? ☐ Tests? ☐ Treatments? ☐ Something else?

What are you worried about?

Be ready to share this information with your provider.

Thank you for being part of the care team.

AHRQ
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Toolbox for Engaging Patients
To Improve Diagnostic Safety | August 2021

Older adults (n=31) reported that the modified “Be the Expert on You” note sheet:

- Helped to organize their thoughts (71.%)
- Helped communication with the physician (77.4%)
- Satisfied with the note sheet (80.6%)
- Would recommend to other patients (77.4%)

Tran A, Blackall L, Hill M, Gallagher, W. (2025) Engaging older adults in diagnostic safety: implementing a diagnostic communication note sheet in a primary care setting



Five diagnostic education takeaways

1. Teach trainees to take a patient-centered approach to care
 - Ask/understand older adult patient's health goals and care preferences to inform diagnostic trajectories ("What matters" of 4Ms)
2. Meaningfully involve other diagnostic team members, including families and caregivers with evidence-based tools
3. Verify that patient-facing materials and communication are age-friendly and appropriate
4. Increase geriatric competencies within training programs
 - Expand geriatric education and training efforts to include diagnostic excellence
5. Be open to learning and improvement opportunities!



Thank you!

alberta.k.tran@medstar.net



@MedStarIQS; [linkedin.com/in/allietran](https://www.linkedin.com/in/allietran)

It's how we **treat people.**



MedStar Health

References

- The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Improving Diagnosis in Health Care*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US). 2015. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/21794/improving-diagnosis-in-health-care>
- Skinner TR, Scott IA, Martin JH. Diagnostic errors in older patients: a systematic review of incidence and potential causes in seven prevalent diseases. *Int J Gen Med*. 2016;9:137-146. DOI: 10.2147/ijgm.S96741
- The National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine. *Advancing Diagnostic Excellence for Older Adults: Proceedings of a Workshop in Brief*. 2022:1-12. DOI:10.17226/26789.
- Tran A, Syed, Q, Bierman, AS, Singh, H. *State of the Science and Future Directions to Improve Diagnostic Safety in Older Adults*. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. September 2024. <https://www.ahrq.gov/diagnostic-safety/resources/issue-briefs/dxsafety-older-adults.html>
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Tools to improve diagnostic safety. March 2024. <https://www.ahrq.gov/diagnostic-safety/tools/index.html>
- Epstein H, Haskell H, Hemmelgarn C, Coffee S...Miller K. *The Patient's Role in Diagnostic Safety and Excellence: From Passive Reception Toward Co-Design*. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. September 2024. <https://www.ahrq.gov/diagnostic-safety/resources/issue-briefs/dxsafety-patient-role.html>
- Tran A, Blackall L, Hill MA, Gallagher W. Engaging older adults in diagnostic safety: implementing a diagnostic communication note sheet in a primary care setting. *Frontiers in Health Services*. 2025;4. DOI: 10.3389/frhs.2024.1474195

