



Story-telling tips for consumers



1. You have been asked to tell a 'snapshot' of your story with our health organisation or service because we value your experience, wisdom and knowledge. We believe our staff can learn from you and will be grateful to hear what you have to say. Don't doubt yourself.
2. Before you pick which piece of your story you want to tell, decide (possibly together with a staff member) what you want to be your main point. Communication? Participation? Respect? Pick one—or two at the most—and stay focused on that.
3. Once you have picked your main point, think back through your health story for vignettes and experiences which help to highlight that point. It can be very hard to do this, but keep asking yourself 'Is this detail important for my main point?' If not, leave it out.
4. Begin with a positive story. Most people have a mixture of good and bad experiences, but if you want to keep your audience listening, think of some things that have worked well...you can come to those that haven't gone well later.
5. Just as you are more than your illness, make your talk about more than a medical history. Your medical details can be summarised in just 1-2 sentences—leaving the rest of the talk for your main point. A health professional may not remember that you had breast cancer, but they will remember your story about the nurse who sat with you and made you a cup of tea when you heard some difficult results. Include story details that bring your points to life, but not medical history details.
6. Include stories (or elements of stories) of how it could have gone better. Consider pairing these with an example of when it did go well. This is a learning opportunity so don't shy away from constructive criticism.
7. Pick the right stories for the right audience. It's no use telling a group of nurses how the doctors can improve! Focus on relevant stories.
8. Don't stress if you shed a tear or two but steer clear of stories you can't finish.
9. Stories are much better told rather than read. It's hard to do, but worth the effort. Practice, practice, practice!
10. Stick to time. If you write out your story, practise it, and then stick to it, you won't run over.
11. State your main point again and again and again—and hopefully they will get it!
12. Give yourself a hand. Sharing a personal health story can be very challenging and scary. But also very rewarding. You are part of the improvement team, helping to make health care safer and better for everyone. Well done.

