

Patience with patients

Patience is an important quality that should be ingrained in every doctor. Here is an incident which shows how patients and their relatives can lose confidence in doctors if they do not possess patience. A relative was admitted for coronary angiogram and subsequently blockages were found in the heart vessels. The consultant doctor informed us that a bypass surgery would be a definitive treatment to this condition. During our stay in the ward after the coronary angiogram, a patient's relative in the immediate next room told us to visit a famous doctor of the city to get done the emergency bypass surgery. We made the phone call to the doctor and the doctor told us to come with the patient and the CD-ROM containing the angiogram videos in the evening. It happened that, since my relative was too tired after the invasive coronary angiogram, we decided to just take the CD-ROM containing angiogram videos as they could be sufficient to let us verify and get a second opinion on whether there was indeed a sufficient heart block that requires a major surgery. Since it was a heavy traffic, we reached 5 minutes late. We greeted the doctor with courtesy and were astonished to see the agitated response of the doctor for arriving few minutes late. The doctor refused to hear the case since we were late. In anger, his hands were shaking that made me wonder whether an angry doctor with shaking hands could really take good decisions and perform a highly sensitive open-heart surgery with accuracy and cool mind. We were relieved that we did not bring with us the already tired relative who probably could be shocked seeing the agitated attitudes of the doctor. We simply came back from the consultation room without saying a word. We then decided to approach a different cardiologist in another city who was known to be empathetic and skilled.

Tough emotional and physical demands of medical training can undermine empathy and communication skills of the doctor.¹ This results in the deterioration of doctor-patient relationship. Patients usually judge doctors by 'bedside manners' and good communication skills.¹ Hence, empathy, patience, courteousness, listening skills, understanding, respect, positive regard and caring attitudes should be acquired by doctors by undergoing regular communication training.¹⁻³ A doctor should show support and care to patients in times of need regardless of who they are.⁴ After all, they are patients' doctor. They are there to help the patients. Business factors should not overshadow the patient-doctor relationship.² A small lapse on patient's/patient's relative part which could be reasonably explained should not agitate the doctor and

break a sacred relationship. This incident highlights a very important lesson for doctors to be compassionate and show empathy to patients with patience. Without patience, all the confidence and faith the patient has on doctors will be lost regardless of the famous tag behind the name.

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