

STUDENTS' CORNER

What it means to be a patient: An introspection into doctor–patient communication

RAAHAT KAPUR, ANOUSH SARDESAI SADAT

Abstract

In this essay, we talk about the importance of the relationship between doctors and patients, and the need for patient-centric communication rather than that with a paternalistic approach. Training of a medical student should include communication skills besides technical training in healthcare. As patient care evolves, communication becomes more crucial; therefore, it is important to understand the repercussions of poor communication skills and how improvement in this vital area can be beneficial.

Keywords: patient–doctor communication, paternalism, communication skills, training, beneficence

As medical students and doctors, it is imperative that we are able to stay on top of our game and to diagnose and manage the medical conditions that confront us. In this process, we must be aware of the repercussions even our mere words may have on the life of the patient before us.

The man pacing up and down the corridor waiting for his lab results; the woman bent over her lap, crying for the child she lost in an accident; another woman, worried sick about her child who is yet to be born. They are not just “cases”; they are someone’s parent, son, daughter, or sister.

We doctors are trained to tackle innumerable medical conditions and syndromes as we study day in and out, burning the midnight oil over that last cup of coffee, which is never the last. We walk down the hospital corridors trying to learn as much as we can, and strain our necks in the operation theatre, just to get a look at how the surgeon ligates an artery, hoping to use that same skill another day.

We start medical school hungry to serve patients, but along the way, we move from treating the patient as a whole, to merely managing the illness. This problem has multiple facets, of which one definitely is the impairment of communication skills, rooted probably in the training of medical students.

Another essential part of a satisfactory doctor–patient relationship is empathy, yet many reports point to its steady decline in medical students as they progress through medical school and residency programmes [1].

A 2002 study by Haidet et al in Texas analysed the attitudes of medical students towards the doctor–patient relationship. They concluded that there is a definite need for curricula that inculcate patient-centred attitudes among medical students. Their findings suggested that students in the senior years of medical school showed increasingly doctor-centred or paternalistic views as compared to students in the junior years [2]. On our journey to becoming doctors, we probably lose that touch of humanity and compassion that motivated most of us to join medical school in the first place.

As one grows in one’s career, the need for empathy and good communication becomes an important part of patient care and though we know that a doctor’s perceptions of patients and mode of communication do affect medical outcomes, studies have brought out how exactly these perceptions affect doctors’ interaction with patients [3].

The Covid-19 pandemic illustrates how the communication gap is exacerbated. A 2021 study carried out by Gopichandran et al with 359 participants in Chennai [4] found that more than 60% of the participants had difficulty communicating with their doctor. The personal protective equipment that doctors wore only added to the mistrust and magnified the communication barrier.

Communication plays an integral role in establishing trust and honesty, so essential to a strong relationship between the patient and the doctor. Patients have high expectations when it comes to the ethics and righteousness of their doctors. The way a doctor behaves with a patient may alter patient outcomes, satisfaction, their adherence to treatment, and recall and understanding of information [5]. The way a doctor explains a medical procedure, therapy or test result to their patient, the patience and time put in to discuss medical issues, and their responses to the patient’s questions are

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Patient Doctor Society A Symposium Of Introspection

RC Schank



Patient Doctor Society A Symposium Of Introspection:

Patient Doctor Society A Symposium Of Introspection Book Review: Unveiling the Magic of Language

In an electronic digital era where connections and knowledge reign supreme, the enchanting power of language has become more apparent than ever. Its ability to stir emotions, provoke thought, and instigate transformation is actually remarkable. This extraordinary book, aptly titled "**Patient Doctor Society A Symposium Of Introspection**," compiled by a highly acclaimed author, immerses readers in a captivating exploration of the significance of language and its profound effect on our existence. Throughout this critique, we shall delve into the book's central themes, evaluate its unique writing style, and assess its overall influence on its readership.

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