

## Effective communication for a better connect with patients



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*shares his views on Case Report*

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Over the two decades since our generation became surgeons, the basics of surgery and surgical principles are constant; what has changed is the requirement for better communication with patients and their relatives.

India, especially the Tier 1 and 2 cities has undergone a shift in the healthcare facilities available to its citizens. Upcoming corporate-run, multi-speciality hospitals have brought with them scepticism and an underlying mistrust in the minds of the common man, who feels that he is constantly being overcharged, over investigated and treatment being either unduly delayed or hastened. The owners of private nursing homes and smaller hospitals don't have it any easier. They face the uphill task of being available 24/7 and being blamed for the smallest of complications, not to mention the ever present threat of media speculation!

Faith building in a patient and his family is no easy task. It's one that takes time and repeated interactions, sometimes to the edge of frustration. However, Effective Communication is the only bridge that can span over mistrust and cynicism and help doctors regain the status that they held in the days gone by.

Management graduates are taught - Listening plays as important a role as Speaking, for communication to be effective.

In all probability, a patient entering our chamber has been prepped by the Internet, his NRI son or his neighbour suffering from a similar ailment and he meets us with a preconceived bias. It's necessary to first hear him out, so that we can answer his queries specifically, allaying his fears and anxieties. This puts him and his relatives in a more positive frame of mind, open to the line of investigations and procedures required.

Secondly, timely communication at regular intervals puts the patient and his caregivers at ease. This could be by SMS, mail alerts or Whatsapp messages. An SMS alert that their patient has been wheeled into the OT or is in recovery can be sent from an assigned number. It's equally important to document the fact that the relatives have been updated about the status of the patient and are in the loop regarding his line of treatment. What lends further transparency and strengthens the bond between patients and the treating physician, is if a proposed line of treatment is discussed between all parties concerned. The ICU in particular, is a setting fraught with strained emotions and frayed nerves. Relatives are found to be calmer and more accepting of the disease outcome if possible lines of treatment have been discussed with them on a regular basis by a dedicated team of doctors, the same being recorded on paper or digitally.

Skype and FaceTime as a mode of Tele consultation for chronic conditions or bedridden patients has been tried in the US and UK and needs to be explored further for the benefit of our patients.

We are as dedicated to our profession as our forefathers were, as committed to our patients; it's the perception of us that has changed. If times have changed, we need to keep up too. Rather than dogmatically stick on to our traditional ways, if incorporating few modifications helps us to achieve our final aim - better patient care, why not?

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