



President's message. Patient-centred care?

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I recently had the opportunity to sample our health care system first-hand. It was an enlightening experience! First, I think the name should be changed to “health treatment system.” Care seems to have become secondary. Second, although we like to call it “patient-centred care,” we should really call it “provider-centred care.” Don’t get me wrong: I received excellent treatment and am grateful for it. My recovery was paramount to my attending team, but it is my perception that the institutional apparatus is geared to the providers.

Ten days in hospital (pre- and post-coronary artery bypass graft) led to the following observations:

- Sleep does not matter. What happened to the hospital zones where those in and outside the hospital were expected to be quiet? Sleep is an important aspect of recovery, but have you ever tried to sleep in a modern hospital? Monitors ding incessantly (same volume day and night), a persistent level of general activity in the room as nurses tend to their charges, patient activity of various kinds day and night, and the routines identified below.
- Vital signs must be taken every 2 or 4 hours (whether patients are awake or not), despite the electronic watchdogs strapped to our chests.

- Blood is needed daily. Drawn at 4 am, 7 am or both.
- Oxygen is good! Good and dry. I am not sure how much quicker healing is with higher oxygen saturation, but it took 2 weeks for my nasal passages to recover from the dryness after 2 days of oxygen by nasal prongs.
- Time with staff is limited. The nurses work very hard, but they have limited time to spend with patients. Questions must be prepared so that you can ask quickly, while they are taking vitals or administering medication. There is little time to establish a relationship (trusting or otherwise) because they have no time to chat. With 12-hour shifts, you see each only for a few days before a new one appears.
- Doctors come early and stay only briefly. I believe that I had great doctors, but their time for questions was limited: I’d guess 3 minutes per day to satisfy my curiosities.

I mentioned to one of my colleagues (a former resident), that if I had experienced this years ago, I would have been a better doctor. Her reply was that I should try to initiate a mandatory 2-day hospital admission for all medical students so they will realize that being a patient is a lot harder than being a doctor. I think she is right!

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