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Doctor-Patient relationship (Part I)

The doctor-patient relationship occupies a unique place. The patient count on complete trust in the expertise and professionalism of the doctor; in turn the doctor has a responsibility to provide the prescribed standard of care for the patient and adhere to the codes of ethical conduct.

Key points in Doctor-Patient relationship

- 1- Central to the practice of medicine and is essential for the delivery of high-quality health care in the diagnosis and treatment of disease.
- 2- A patient must have confidence in the competence of their doctor and must feel that they can confide in him or her.
- 3- The doctor-patient relationship forms one of the foundations of contemporary medical ethics.
- 4- The four great corner stones of diagnostic medicine are anatomy (structure: what is there), physiology (how the structure work), pathology (what goes wrong with the anatomy and physiology) and psychology(mind and behavior). In addition the socio-political context of the patient (family, work, stress, beliefs)

- 5- The physician-patient can be analyzed from the perspective of ethical concerns, in terms of how well the goals of non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice are achieved.

- 6- The quality of the patient-physician relationship is important to both parties, the better the relationship in terms of mutual respect, knowledge, trust, shared values and perspectives about disease and life, and time available, the better will be the amount and quality of information about the patient's disease transferred in both directions, enhancing accuracy of diagnosis and increasing the patient's knowledge about the disease.

So the trust and dependence of patient, the physical nature of the doctor-patient interaction, and expectation of mutual respect are some features of this unique human relationship.

Trust

The complexity of medical science may not allow for complete understanding on the part of the patient, of the implication of diagnosis, proposed treatment, or prognosis of the disease. He would have to trust that the doctor is knowledgeable, adequately trained, and motivated to take care for him. The patient expects that all necessary information will be communicated appropriately and the doctor will be compassionate in physical examination, diagnosis, and treatment.

Physical contact

Another unique feature which is unavoidable part of the doctor-patient interaction. Not only is the patient vulnerable due to pain, suffering but also there is an unavoidable crossing of physical boundaries necessary for diagnosis and medical care. The doctor is expected to display respect to for the body and personhood of patient at all times, ensuring complete physical privacy and confidentiality.

Respect

The doctor must respect the patient all times so as to earn respect and trust of the patient. The doctor has to look beyond the distress of the patient and see the patient as a human or person. Whether the patient is child or senior, mentally ill, physical deformed, or covered with sores, bleeding or unconsciousness , the human body and personhood of the patient must be respected. Respect of the patient means also respect for the patient's right to choose. Information must be provided to help the patient with his decision and consent must be taken for physical examination, diagnostic tests, as well as treatment procedures.

Honesty

Every patient expects that his doctor will be totally honest with him. Its an essential component of the DP relationship. Truth telling is necessary for the patient to make valid choices regarding his health or treatment. With experiences the doctor is able to assess the emotional readiness of the patient to receive information and the best method of disclosure.

There may be situations when patients choose not to know the results of investigations or tests. This could arise with community testing or genetic information. In these situations, the doctor may have to respect the right of the patient not to know the truth, unless the choice could affect the health of the patient or the community.