Press Release

Communication key to building trust between doctors and patients

*Includes informing patients about travel plans and putting the interest of the patients before everything else*

New Delhi, 28 June 2017: According to research, patient dissatisfaction and many other complaints are due to breakdown in the doctor-patient relationship. Communication is the key to developing and nurturing the trust between a doctor and the patient. The main goals of current doctor-patient communication are: creating a good interpersonal relationship, facilitating exchange of information, and including patients in decision making. On the occasion of the upcoming Doctors Day, IMA sheds some light on ways in which the doctor-patient relationship can be strengthened.

According to the MCI Regulation, "A physician is required to be 'diligent in caring for the sick' (MCI Regulation 1.1.2). Once he/she undertakes a case, the physician should not neglect them or withdraw from the case without giving adequate notice to the patient and his family (MCI Regulation 2.4)." Also, as per the rules, a doctor is at the risk for a medical malpractice in the event that he/she fails to do the aforementioned.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "The relationship between a doctor and patient is sacrosanct. It forms right from the time a patient visits the doctor, who in turn agrees to treat him/her. This ‘implied contract’ imposes on the doctor a legal duty to exercise due skill and care in providing medical treatment. Once a patient comes to the doctor, he/she becomes duty bound to provide continuity of care even while on travel or when unable to attend to the patient. So, before undertaking a case, if a doctor is planning a visit out of town or a vacation, he/she still needs to take care of the patients."

Patients rely on doctors for help in the time of need. Regulation 1.2.1 of MCI Code of Ethics requires that “…Physicians should merit the confidence of patients entrusted to their care, rendering to each a full measure of service and devotion.”

The trust that the patient reposes in his/her doctor places an ethical obligation on the doctor to always put the interests of the patient first, including when the doctor is travelling.
Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "Inform the patient about the duration of time you would be away and the dates of your departure and return. If you have arranged for another physician to take care of the patients in your absence, it is a good idea to share his/her name, along with the credentials and training, with your patients. This will enable them to make an informed decision on whether to continue with you as their doctor. If your patient is about to undergo surgery, he/she must know that you would not be there for the post-op care. Take an informed consent of the patient or else avoid the surgery."

Doctors with better communication and interpersonal skills can detect problems earlier, prevent medical crises and expensive intervention, and provide better support to patients. There is a need to tailor medical education in a way that it goes beyond skills training to encourage physicians' responsiveness to the patients' unique experience.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2,60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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