“Baar baar poocho”: IMA recommendations for effective patient-physician communication

Patient outcomes depend on successful communication especially, in cases where sensitive or personal information is sought. IMA’s “Baar baar poocho” approach aims to sensitize the medical fraternity in this regard.

New Delhi, Jan 25, 2017: In a clinical setting, there are often crowded rooms and physicians get little time to interact with each patient. Sharing private and sensitive information in such an environment can seem overwhelming for the patients. Even if they are willing to divulge the details, they may hesitate to do so in the first sitting itself.

IMA’s “Baar baar poocho” approach warrants that the physician should politely question patients regularly and multiple times, about sensitive information related to depression, alcohol use, smoking habits, drug abuse, and sexual needs and preferences.

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 that, “Patients rarely divulge sensitive information in the first sitting. Many factors keep them from doing so like shyness, hesitation, presence of family members, other unknown people in the room etc. From experience, it is generally seen that the patient, even on 5th or 6th sitting does not freely share sensitive information. In such a scenario the physician needs to adopt a calm and reassuring manner and question the patient several times to ensure that he does not suffer in silence. Even after this approach, the patient may only freely discuss his/her issues on the 8th to 12th sitting with the doctor. This may seem like a tedious task but it is the responsibility of all doctors to do everything it takes to improve a patients’ health.”

Listening skills are even more important while dealing with patients coming with mental health concerns. A recent survey showed that more than two-fifths of adults might not tell their doctor about their depressive symptoms. Studies have shown that 44% patients, on antidepressant therapy for depression by a primary care physician, discontinued treatment within 3 months after initiation. Amongst the factors behind this premature discontinuation, poor patient-physician communication is a major determinant.
“Personal, mental or psychosomatic issues are still considered taboo in India and hence the general perception overshadows patient behavior in clinical settings. Doctors need to understand this, and ask their patient about such details while maintaining privacy and giving an assurance that the information will be strictly confidential. Building a trustworthy relationship with the patient is the pre-requisite. This also applies to patients who have been victims of sexual or mental abuse especially, children”, added Dr. Aggarwal.

A physician who encourages open communication and is persistent in his/her endeavors may obtain more complete information and thus, enhance the likelihood of making a more accurate diagnosis. Listening has a manifold aspect in improving clinical outcome:

- It is a crucial component of clinical data gathering and diagnosis
- In itself listening acts as a healing and therapeutic agent
- It is a means of fostering and strengthening the doctor–patient relationship

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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 29 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 53,000 doctors as its members through more than 1650 active local branches spread across the country.

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