“Sun toh lo”: IMA recommendations for effective patient-physician communication

A doctor’s ability to listen, understand and empathize with the patient has profound implications on clinical outcomes.

New Delhi, Jan 28, 2017: Generally, in a hospital or a clinical setting, doctors are inundated with information coming from several sources. This overwhelming burden of data can make it an uphill task to listen to the patient properly and keenly.

IMA’s “Sun toh lo” campaign leverages the voice of the common patient urging their physicians to have some patience and listen to the people they’re caring for.

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, “Studies centered on patient-doctor communication have found that on average, physicians wait around 18 seconds before interrupting a patient’s narrative. Moreover, patients misunderstood directions in over 60% cases. This highlights the need to inculcate listening skills in Indian medical professional community. It is genuinely understandable that with the high-pressure environment of the hospital, paying so much attention to every patient is not an easy task. What matters here is that intently listening for the first few minutes of a patient interaction can save a lot of valuable time in subsequent visits.”

“For doctors the skill of listening is a very fundamental one, that can help build the tone of a patient-doctor interaction. Good listening is key for mental health counselling. When doctors listen to their patients, they feel more cared which enable the doctor to do a more effective job. The skill of listening is also highlighted in the first chapter of the Bhagvad Gita where Lord Krishna devotes all his time listening to what Arjuna has to say. Same applies to you and your patient, the patient may ramble on and give unnecessary narrative but you can steer the conversation to gain fruitful information if you listen properly”, added Dr. Aggarwal.

Following are some key listening skills for doctors:

1. Stay focused on the moment and the patient
2. Make use of good eye contact
3. Try to catch on to the emotional tone of the patient
4. Take a 5-10 second pause before replying
5. Rephrase and emphasize the points of importance

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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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