

Communication from the side of the bed

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“Does your brother take any medications?” was the first thing I heard on the phone. As a physician, I knew that question was loaded with meaning, and most likely it was going to be followed by bad news. I learned that my brother was involved in a car accident, leaving him with multiple injuries, and was being admitted to the ICU.

My parents, who had to fly from outside the country, met me at the hospital that same night where the ICU became our second home for the coming weeks. The initial days were the most agonizing. We held his hand, whispered words of encouragement, and hoped for any sign of improvement. We took turns sitting by my brother's side, hearing all the information the treatment team had for us each day.

Even as an internal medicine physician, some very specific medical terms were not familiar to me. I had to continuously ask what everything meant so I could understand and subsequently translate the information in Spanish for my parents so they could be involved in my brother's care. I could not stop thinking about how patients and families with no medical background hear all the medical terms, and most of the time, just nod.

Effective communication is vital in the field of health care, where clear and concise information can significantly impact patient outcomes, and I witnessed it firsthand. I am extremely grateful to the doctors who took the time to sit with us and explain what was going on. While medical professionals possess a wealth of specialized knowledge, it is essential to convey complex medical concepts to patients and their families in easily understandable terms.

Medical jargon and technical language can be overwhelming. By utilizing simple, everyday terms that a layperson can understand, we can empower patients by helping them comprehend their medical conditions, treatments, and procedures. When patients understand their health issues, they can actively participate in decision-making, and ask informed questions. This

knowledge fosters a sense of control, reduces anxiety, and enables patients and families to take an active role in the health care journey because they feel understood and respected. This fosters a sense of trust, and encourages open dialogue.

In multicultural societies, language and cultural differences can present significant challenges in health care communication. Using every day terms helps bridge these barriers by simplifying complex medical information into universally understandable language. This enables health care providers to effectively communicate with patients from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that important medical details are not lost in translation. It promotes cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

In my brother's case, after digesting all the information and making informed decisions, my brother's mind and body showed slow signs of progress. His determination, combined with the unwavering support of the medical team and our family, became the driving force behind his progress. The day we received news of his imminent discharge from the rehabilitation center was a moment of immense joy and gratitude.

My brother's accident had a profound impact on our entire family. We emerged stronger, cherishing every precious moment and valuing the strength that comes from unity. The most valuable lesson I took for my own personal practice, was how using every day, simple terms and family communication make an impact on patient care that I never thought possible. I hope that I can inspire health care providers to be mindful of the language they use so that patients and families can easily comprehend thereby ensuring that the people at the side of the bed can have an active role in their family member's health.

Regarding my brother's journey, I can happily share that, he is fulfilling his dream of being an orthopedic surgeon, helping trauma patients, and providing excellent medical communication to his patients and their families. We could not be happier.

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