

Modern Medical Consultation Today!

Is it physician's time or patient's time? Not difficult to conclude that we are at the mercy of the doctor we choose to see for our health problem at any point in time and how much time the doctor may spend with us. Not only that we may seem to have no freedom or courage to ask any questions, especially if we have a perception of our condition/illness, or to clarify what we learnt ourselves from the internet.

If doctors take too long, it costs them money. If they take less than the prescribed time, they will have extra time to do something else that can make them more money. Most systems of consultation in the world today favour the doctor, leaving little choice to the patient. Apart from initial question of inquiring about the reason for visit, there is usually a monologue where doctor spells out what is wrong with the patient and what needs to be done, often followed by a long list of medications.

Patients' dissatisfaction with consultation length could be managed by making consultation longer. Alternatively, it could be managed by changing how a given time is spent. In particular, a doctor who listens and tries to understand his/her patient may make the patient feel more satisfied with the consultation length and subsequently more motivated to follow any advice for change.[\[1\]](#)

I was encouraged to read home page of one of my doctor friends. Knowing him, he means it and practices it. The statement starts with – he likes to focus on the entire person rather than just one aspect of care, likes to emphasize preventive care, and likes to spend time discussing things like diet, exercise and paying attention to mind-body interaction and so on.[\[2\]](#) I would say those visiting his surgery are the lucky ones.

The Hippocratic Oath[\[3\]](#) is an oath historically taken by physicians. I do not know the status of it today, but I certainly took it at my graduation, fully realising what I was committing myself into. It requires a new physician to swear, by a number of *healing gods* too uphold specific ethical standards. ...I will apply for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required, avoiding those twin traps of overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism... I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," ... I will respect the privacy of my patients... I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure... Above all, I must not play at God... among other things. Swearing a modified form of the Oath remains a rite of passage for medical graduates in many countries. From what little we know, modern medical practice today is a far cry from the Hippocratic Oath that most of us took at our graduations.

To focus on the entire person rather than just one aspect of care takes time and doctors don't want to do that. Over the years of this pattern of consultation has taught the public to expect a bag full of medications for complaints patient may have. How often patients who are suffering from chronic diseases have been rescued by some sensible doctor to stop everything and start afresh with what is essentially required to address the treatment needs of the patient.

The other day, my wife suffering from cough and sore throat wanted to see a doctor, even though after assessing her condition, I had advised her that it will clear up in a few days and to continue to take symptomatic treatment. Wives do not trust husbands, even if he is a doctor, and went on to see her general practitioner. The doctor listened to her complaints, did not bother to look into her throat or examine chest, and without saying a word went on to

prescribe amoxicillin, paracetamol, cetirizine, bromhexine and a cough syrup containing codeine. On returning home, I explained the drugs to her and suggested that apart from paracetamol and possibly cetirizine, none of the drugs were indicated. Needless to say that in two days she was back to normal without any medication. The doctor got his share from her health insurance and pharmaceuticals benefitted for the sale of medications, and the nation lost a chunk of money which could have been better spent on advising the patient. Whilst patients have always trusted their doctors – this trust is now breaking down and literature confirms that every aspect of medical care is riddled with corruption.[\[4\]](#)

Annual medical check-ups is a big business. The medical checks, conducted by many private institutions at a price, are directed towards preventive care and addressing risk factors. Medicals are loved by many people and their doctors. But studies show that the actual exam isn't very helpful in discovering problems and may lead to unnecessary tests. Leading doctors and medical groups have called the annual physical exam "not necessary" in generally healthy people. I feel that annual/periodical medicals are useful after fifty, only if a competent doctor at the end of the medical takes time to study the results carefully, compares it with previous results and takes good history of the patient, and finally explains to the patient what way the patient could continue to maintain good health or in case of identified risk factors to address them naturally and only uses medication as a last resort. However, the picture is very different. One is conveyed through a battery of tests for most of the morning. When it comes to consultation with the doctor, it is usually a young inexperienced doctor and not a qualified internist, who just runs through the test results and gives a statement on each if it is normal or abnormal. It becomes evident that the whole exercise is to extract dollars from the patient with little advice coming at the end.

Exercising, keeping a healthy weight, and not smoking are enough to keep most of us in good health, with or without an annual exam. Still, no one can argue with keeping up a good relationship with your doctor through regular visits. As long as you and your doctor are paying attention to prevention and your overall health, the details are up to you.

Mind over body: We have an extraordinary mind which can help us, if we want, at times of distress. For a long time doctors have kept psychology at bay from general practice. The most western medicine has done is to dump everything under psychiatry and label people as lunatics if their symptoms cannot be put in a medical box! The realisation of mind and body and the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social and spiritual factors can directly affect health, is being recognised; and with mind boggling results. Mind can kill or cure us. Deepak Chopra, in one of his earlier, books describes his experience as a young doctor with a patient who literally killed himself by over stressing himself with a symptom of chest pain. On post mortem the patient had no pathology in the heart but it had burst open because of extreme self-inflicted stress due to the fear of chest pain. Numerous studies demonstrate the efficacy of mind-body medicine techniques in lowering blood pressure and stress hormone levels, relieving pain and improving immune functioning, as well as improvements in clinical conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. Fear of debilitating illness and death makes our mind work against our body and positive thinking can make a big difference.

- It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. – Aristotle
- The mind is everything. What you think you become. – Buddha

- Awareness isn't passive. It directly leads to action (or inaction). As you take steps to expand your awareness, you will naturally find yourself harnessing your mind's infinite power to create greater health, happiness, and love in your life. – Deepak Chopra

At this critical juncture, time is right that each one of us understand the power of mind and use this tool for our own health and happiness.

Doctors please note:

1. Listen to your patients;
2. Answer their concerns and questions;
3. Do not over-medicate your patient;
4. Remember prevention is better than cure;
5. Don't be afraid to admit, "I know not"!
6. Do not exploit your patient for your benefits.

And Patients please remember:

1. Don't be afraid to ask questions to your doctor;
2. Ask how the medicine works and help in the illness;
3. Ask for preventive advice;
4. Remember taking medicine is a serious business and over-medication is harmful;
5. Try understanding the power of Mind over Body;
6. Be conscious of doctor's time as well, as he has long list of patients to go through!

References:

[1] Jane Ogden et al. Family Practice, Vol 21, Issue 5, 1 October 2004. P479-483.

[2] <http://www.rajabhatmd.com>

[3] [A modern version of Hippocratic](#)

[Oath.](https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=20909)

[4] Healers or Predators? Healthcare Corruption in India. Edited by Samiran Nundy, Keshav Desiraju and Sanjay Nagral. 2018. Oxford Uni. Press.