

What Makes a Good Doctor?

Have you ever sat in a public place and heard people talking about a recent experience with their doctor and their comments are often not positive but rather they are describing a negative event that has recently occurred and how it has impacted their life or one of a family member, relative or friend? My observations have been that they are either complaining about an issue or just simply accepting it as the status quo. I cannot recall hearing a remark where they have decided they needed to change their doctor although some have suggested getting another opinion.

My doctor has these words on his desk within his eyesight so that he remains balanced and ever mindful of his fallibility and the reason he is sitting there.

My faith in doctors is immense. Just one thing spoils it. Their pretence of unauthorised omniscience.

Anon

This week I had a conversation with a doctor's receptionist who can only be contacted once a week about why the doctor does not reply to his correspondence. I was told the doctor was very busy. This seemed to her and obviously her employer to be a justifiable stance to take. I would very much disagree with this point of view. Being busy is **never** an acceptable reason for ignoring your patients, it is just an excuse for a lack of concern, arrogance and most probably poor time management skills and staff.

I hold a lifelong belief that mostly you get the doctor you deserve. There are occasions when we have no say over the attending physician but they are much rarer than one thinks. My point is change doctors until you get the one who meets your needs and places you in the prime of place. I travel over an hour each way to see mine. It is your responsibility to engage a doctor not your good luck!

So, what does make a good doctor or what makes a bad doctor?

Firstly, we need to deal with the English language - yet again. By good I do not mean that I am particularly interested in their health, welfare, happiness or virtue but I am vitally interested in them having the suitable and desirable qualities that are good for my healthcare and wellbeing. I think we need to have a basic set of questions answered before we make this decision. That list should include the following;

- 1) Do they listen and understand you by using feedback? **Yes/No?**
- 2) Do they speak to me in my language or theirs? **Yes/No?**
- 3) Do they display compassion? **Yes/No?**
- 4) Do they demonstrate genuine concern for you? **Yes/No?**
- 5) Do they admit to having little knowledge on a subject but commit to finding out for you? **Yes/No?**
- 6) Do they follow through? **Yes/No?**
- 7) Do they have a contact protocol if you need them in a time of distress? **Yes/No?**
- 8) Do they answer your questions in person? **Yes/No?**
- 9) Do they respond to your correspondence within a few days? **Yes/No?**
- 10) Do they have sound medical knowledge? **Yes/No?**
- 11) Do they clearly explain to you what may be the cause of your visit? **Yes/No?**
- 12) Do they clearly explain to you the medications prescribed? **Yes/No?**

These are not in order and contain just some of the questions you may wish to ask when settling on a family doctor or specialist. In quality assurance, we ask many questions in determining that a product or process is the best quality possible and then we develop management systems to ensure that it happens exactly the same way every time. You need to ask yourself; "is my doctor fit for the purpose he trained and is he fit for purpose to meet my high-quality needs?" Do I have the confident assurance that I have chosen a good doctor **Yes/No?**

We live in a world where historically our medical profession worked our junior doctors for 100 hours per week in our hospitals and saw it as good training. This illogical piece of reasoning meant the least trained were subjected to the most inhumane working conditions and we expected this to produce an error free medical system and with the best qualified doctors who could work under extraordinary stress and do no harm! It is changing at a heavy-eyed pace. The funding sources of our hospitals are of course very grateful for this piece of convenient stupidity.

I can honestly say that among my very best friends are many, many doctors and this written piece is not about bashing their profession but rather about putting to death the myth that we revere a person because they are a doctor as many of us were taught by our parents. Choose well.

Never venerate your doctor because of a plaque hanging on a wall! Accord them the respect they generate due to your ongoing relationship with them.