The Importance of Honesty During Prognosis: Personal Injury

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The Importance of Honesty During Prognosis after a Personal Injury

When we discuss our medical condition with health professionals we trust that we are being given all the relevant facts and, perhaps more importantly, we assume that we are hearing the truth. However, life is rarely straightforward and doctors must tread a fine line between reassuring the patient and revealing appropriate levels of information about the patient's condition.

Keeping the patient's trust

Most patients find it reassuring and helpful to trust doctors and health professionals to do the right thing. In some instances, the patient's trust in the doctor's skill can have a significant bearing on the recovery process which demonstrates the importance of the relationship between the two. Feelings of disempowerment on the other hand, or lack of trust in a doctor's skill or judgement can negatively impact recovery, as can lack of empathy or understanding of the patient's situation.

Not only should doctors possess the necessary medical and surgical skills to assist patients in recovery, but they are also required to be counsellors and diplomats too. Health professionals need to assess the mental attitudes of patients when considering how much, or how little, of a prognosis each individual is able to cope with.

A patient with severe spinal trauma after an accident at work may wish to know the likelihood of making a full and complete recovery. Whilst one patient in such a situation may deal with the knowledge that he will never walk again, for another patient with a similar condition the perceived lack of hope offered by such a prognosis could cause a major depression. Every case has to be judged on its own merits with the doctor trying to ascertain the likely effects of a full and frank diagnosis.

Involving the wider family

When family members are invited to participate in consultations with health professionals concerning the health prospects of a relative, doctors are able to refine their decision making accordingly. Background information into the patient's state of mind, general state of health and resilience in the face of adversity can have a profound effect on the doctor's subsequent bedside manner.

In cases of spinal trauma, to revisit the previous example, after learning that family members believe the patient is mentally unsuited to learning about long-term disability at the present time, the doctor may choose to soften the prognosis by focussing purely on the 'here and now' aspects of recovery and treatment. Conversely, another family might indicate to the doctor that the relative in question would easily absorb a negative prognosis, leaving the doctor able to discuss the likely implications of the injury with compunction.

Allowing the full prognosis to be divulged to patients a little at a time, at a rate appropriate to each patient's ability to deal with the facts, makes for a better and more trusting relationship between patient and physician. Good understanding between the two is of great importance if a patient is to undergo not only a long and sometimes painful period of adjustment and rehabilitation, but also a potentially lengthy and tiring legal process to achieve an appropriate level of compensation.

Produced on behalf of Hughes Carlisle accident at work solicitors, conveying information on topics relating to the injury itself; ensuring for a full recovery.