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Patient-centred care: what's important to our patients?

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Abstract
Patients were asked what mattered to them in their episode of surgery and anaesthesia. Although most responses were based on the medical condition and procedure, this approach allowed the anaesthetist to customise aspects of care to individual patients. It is a concept that appears relevant and worthwhile to our patients.

Keywords
patients, centred, important, patient, our, care

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CORRESPONDENCE

Patient-centred care: what’s important to our patients?

Patient-centred care has been an emerging theme in medicine as a whole over the last decade but to a lesser degree in anaesthesia. Most of the literature on patient-centred care in anaesthesia has focused on surveys of satisfaction with anaesthesia care or on quality of recovery. Genuine patient-centred care has been described as a change in attitude from ‘what is the matter with the patient’ to ‘what matters to the patient’. While the implications of this in chronic disease or community care are fairly obvious, how does this apply to discrete acute care situations such as anaesthesia?

I asked 50 consecutive patients one simple question at the end of my routine preoperative consultation: “Thank you for all this information that matters to me in making a plan to look after you. Can I ask you one more question: what matters most to you today?” The project was registered with the local hospital Quality Activity Program (ISLHD Quality Activity Online Register, Sept 2013). The local Research and Clinical Governance Units waived the need for further ethical review and approved publication of this data.

The patients presented for a wide range of elective and emergency procedures. Parents were asked if a paediatric patient was too young. Most of the responses were straightforward (see Table 1). Almost half were concerned about their medical condition; either its diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment. About a third were most concerned about coming through the procedure itself, safely and well. Over 10% reported no significant concerns at all, including two teenagers and three parents of small children. Two patients reported other concerns. Both of these wanted a fast and functional recovery in order to care for others.

Was the question relevant to this patient population? I think so. Most answers were predictable and restricted to the discrete acute care episode. The additional question did yield some extra information at times, either about specific procedure-related concerns or about other more personal concerns. The information helped me to focus my reassurance and even occasionally my anaesthetic technique in order to address the patients’ specific priorities (eg extra emphasis on a calm emergence for the parents who didn’t want their child to wake up distressed). I can report with certainty that my patients were not used to being asked for their own opinion about their own care; almost all of them appeared completely taken aback and some were quite confused.

The question of what matters most to patients presenting for a discrete episode of acute care may at times provide clues that can help us improve the overall patient experience, even if only in a small way. I will continue to ask!

N. Smith
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References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of response</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>Quoted examples of general concerns</th>
<th>Quoted examples of specific concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related to medical disease or condition</td>
<td>23 46%</td>
<td>See if there’s a problem that can be fixed</td>
<td>That the baby is OK (for a Caesarean Section patient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To fix the problem</td>
<td>To take the pain away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To get well</td>
<td>To exclude other problems (ie in differential diagnosis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to the procedure</td>
<td>17 34%</td>
<td>Get through this OK</td>
<td>That my child is not too stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Get out of here with the test completed</td>
<td>That my child doesn’t have a bad reaction to the anaesthetic or any complication during the procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Get home safely</td>
<td>To not be sick afterwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other concerns</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>To come out good so that I can look after my husband (who was a sick in -patient at the time)</td>
<td>To get out of here so that I can go home and give my (young) daughter a big hug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No concerns</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>Nothing much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I am not worried about anything</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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