

The Best Physician Education and Patient Empowerment

Getting Self Care Support from Health Professionals

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It is the conviction of the medical profession that the empowered patient is an educated and well informed patient.

The empowered patient is also the best guarantee for patient autonomy, which creates possibilities for stable self determination and decision making, in all health care situations.

The rights of the patient to health care information are both fundamental and necessary in order to achieve, in most situations, informed consent from the patient.

Equally important are the rights of the patients to education in order to assist them in making necessary informed choices on personal health, decisions on healthy lifestyles and how to prevent illnesses.

Personal responsibility for one's own health, also in the self care situation, makes the obligation on physicians' active participation in the education of patients and citizens even more important.

This has all been stated, as core ethical values of the medical profession, in the WMA (World Medical Association) Declaration on the Rights of the Patient from Lisbon 1981, revised 1995.

In self care it is equally important to the medical profession, as for the highest possible quality and safety, that citizens are well informed

through accurate and relevant information on health in combination with access to a dialogue for questions, answers and additional information with physicians or other health professionals.

Health information today comes from many varied sources. It must always be, written or oral, on paper or electronic, evidence based on internationally approved medical science. It has to be understandable, correct and unbiased.

The distinction must be clear between commercial marketing and information. On this issue industry, other producers and distributors all have a special responsibility, as well as national and relevant international health agencies or authorities.

In validation of health information the medical profession has a key role and so have health authorities and patients organisations.

To further strengthen the rights of the patients and citizens to correct and relevant health information clear, transparent and accepted rules must be agreed upon, on how to inform, by all who give health and health care information to patients and citizens. A code of conduct on patient information must be established as an important aspect of health quality and safety.

It is also fundamental, in order to take the idea of the importance of the well informed patient or citizen further, to give optimal access to health information. It is therefore important that a project, such as the EU Health Portal, is launched as planned.

Creating easily accessible networks of validated and correct health information, on both national and international levels, is strongly supportive to the informed decisions of patients and citizens.

An important step to further strengthen patients and citizens in their decision making on health is to develop and strengthen the dialogue, with physicians or other health care professionals. The importance of a direct contact for questions and answers, as well as additional information, is significant. This possibility has to be provided on the

national level primarily. Such advice and information must always be given within the competence of each health care profession and in line with professional ethics.

This has all been stated by CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors) in its policy On Information to Patients and Patient Empowerment from 2004.

In conclusion, in order to achieve empowered patients and well informed citizens in the self care situation, we have to:

- Provide health information that is understandable, correct and evidence based.
- Give broad access to health information through many means and always according to clear and accepted rules on how to inform.
- Facilitate the empowering dialogue between physicians and other health care professionals, patients and citizens.