My Surgery: A Casual Disregard For Patients

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At last it was time for my cataract surgery. Having had one eye surgery done [1] by a different physician in another New York eye and ear specialty hospital a few months earlier, I knew what to look for and could make comparisons from a patient perspective. As I noted months ago on this blog, I really had no choice of hospitals. If I wanted my trusted doctor to do the operation, I would have to go where he recommended. But my patient experience was much different this time and made me aware of how many places in the chain of care where mistakes can occur.

At admission that morning, I received a 25-page Patient's Guide to Surgery. It was full of useful information for people facing surgery. But how is someone who is about to have an operation in a few minutes going to make use of stuff they should have seen weeks ago? That's a good question for The Joint Commission, the hospital accrediting organization, next time they evaluate this hospital.

Then, while waiting for my surgical prep, I observed discourteous treatment of patients. An elderly man fiddled with the tie on his robe, but a brusque hospital worker sticking thermometers in patients' ears and wrapping blood pressure cuffs didn't help him as he struggled to get the ties in the right place. Hmmm, I thought. Is this the kind of patient-centered care the Institute of Medicine advocated for more than a decade ago?

My next encounter was with a distracted nurse who quickly put a bunch of drops in my eyes and asked questions about my medications. She was reconciling what was listed in the charts my doctor had sent over. Reasonable enough.

Then we hit a communications barrier. It was the first time I was speaking English about my medical records to another person who's English I did not understand. I got a flavor for what non-English speakers experience in medical settings. Frustration is the word that comes to mind.

The nurse, who could not clearly pronounce the generic names of eye meds, repeatedly asked me if I was still taking them. Finally, I asked to see the list and ticked off the current regimen. It was the only way to communicate.

Continue reading... [2]

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