**Title Page**

**Title**: Key requisites in the conduct of a modern-day physician- need of the hour

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**Abstract**

The modern-day medical practice is full of challenges. With increasing distrust between the physician and the patients, it is pertinent that the traits needed in a physician to maximize the trust should be emphasized. Incidentally, unlike commonly assumed, the increasing litigation rate by the patients is not much related to money or even expertise of the physician. It is more related to three cardinal traits (3 C’s) in a physician- *Concern, Clarity (transparency) and Communication.*

**Keywords**

Conduct of physician; Primary care issues: clinician-patient communication/relationship; concern; transparency; litigation

**Text**

India is the largest democracy in the world coupled with the oldest traditions. Charaka, the renowned Indian physician practiced medicine in 3rd  century BC1 and Susruta had developed innovative surgical techniques for general, gastrointestinal and plastic surgery in as early as 6th century BC2. Conventionally in India, the relation between doctor-patient had been that of charity. The doctor used to treat the ‘suffering’ patient primarily taking it as his duty to serve humanity, and monetary benefits were secondary. The non-affording patients were treated free or at subsidized rates. In return, doctors were given immense respect and the status of ‘next to God’. This system continued for several centuries till the things started to change three decades back. With massive progress in health sciences and medical equipment, the physician was just one of the players in providing the quality healthcare. The latest equipment and technology became as pertinent as the skills of the doctor.

The mushrooming of private health sector especially after 1990 brought world class health facilities to India. But it came with a price. The companies investing heavily in private healthcare needed to thrive and naturally the charges became a prerequisite to get the medical treatment. The model slowly changed from ‘service’ model to a ‘consumer’ model. With this came the expected problems of mistrust and litigations. As the private healthcare sector in India increased from peanuts in 1990 to about $100 billion today, the mistrust (between doctor-patient) and the litigation rate increased at a much more faster rate. Money factor had quickly changed the whole dynamics of healthcare in India.

Amidst this crucial transition, I started my medical schooling in New Delhi in 1990 and the independent medical practice in private sector in north India in early 2001. I was quite aware of the changing scenario in healthcare in the country. The confusing question before me was “How to strike optimum balance between charging money and minimizing the risk of litigation?”. I understood the rule- if the money is charged, then litigation is inevitable and should be expected. But I was proved wrong. After two decades of experience, I realized that the litigation by the patient was rarely related to the money charged. If three C’s – Concern, Clarity and Communication- are taken care of, then a majority of mistrust and litigation issues can be prevented. Surprisingly, expertise is also not one of them.

*Concern* regarding the patient and his health is of cardinal importance. It is something which doesn’t need to be spoken. If it’s there, patient will automatically come to know and vice-versa. It’s preferable to have concern not only for the ailment which the physician is treating but also for the overall wellbeing of the patient (Figure-1). Empathy for the patient cannot be substituted or eliminated from the physician’s arsenal. Though this demands extra effort physically and mentally on the physician’s part but it is a cardinal reason which makes medical profession different and more respected than all other professions. Concern is a double edged sword. Having concern for the patient helps to earn respect while lack of the same erodes respect rapidly.

*Clarity* or transparency is conveying clearly to the patient about treating physician’s capability and efforts and patient’s condition and prognosis at all times. This is paramount to earn patient’s confidence. This honesty on physician’s part even helps to circumvent any deficiency in physician’s expertise. When the physician has clearly conveyed his shortcomings (in expertise, experience or logistics etc) before initiating the treatment, then the patient develops confidence that the physician is not concealing anything. Then even if the treatment does not lead to the expected outcome, the chances of patient going for the litigation becomes quite low. There is a saying “ *You might be as intelligent as Einstein, but never underestimate the intellect of the person in front of you*”. If the physician is honest, the patient will understand it and if the physician is dishonest, then the patient will definitely know of it. Therefore, clarity though may not be beneficial in short-term but is extremely beneficial in the long-term building of reputation of the physician and in preventing litigation.

Thirdly, *communication* is a basic fundamental trait required in the physician for a good physician-patient relationship. Good communication is key to enforce the first two traits- concern and clarity. If the physician has both the first two traits but falters in communicating them, then their presence goes futile. Therefore, communication is a skill that is mandatory for every physician to develop.

It is not difficult to understand why patients’ dissatisfaction and litigation are not about money. For example if a patient is charged $100 for a treatment and he feels that he got services from the physician worth $125, then he would be satisfied. However, if a patient spends $50 on the same treatment but feels that he got services worth just $30, then he would be dissatisfied and would be a potential litigant. Therefore, rather than the amount of money, it’s the comparative value the physician provide to the patient is what matters. The above three physician’s traits, especially concern, has no objective monetary value but add immense subjective and psychological value to the treatment. Their adequate presence raises the patients satisfaction to an altogether new level and hence decreases the chances of litigation proportionately.

Therefore, these three traits- concern, clarity and communication- in the physician are cornerstone to build physicians’ reputation, boost physician-patient relationship and prevent potential litigations. Presence of these three traits can compensate for money factor or some deficiency in physician’s expertise. On the other hand, absence of even one of these traits immensely increase the patient dissatisfaction rate even in presence of great expertise and minimal money factor!

Unfortunately, these three cardinal skills are being not taught actively in medical schools in most parts of the world . Their inclusion in theory as well as practical classes in the medical schools is paramount to build a long-term harmonious physician-patient relationship in the society.

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**Figure legends**

Figure-1: Traits required in a modern day physician

