**I know you didn't follow-up three years ago**

***Salik Ansari, MSc. Research Ethics***

**Abstract**

*In this anecdote, I describe an experience I had with a private medical practitioner. I discovered something, which turned out to be a usual practice in healthcare. This piece is a narration of that discovery and the subsequent reflection afterward. The purpose of this piece is not to malign an individual or the system but rather encourage dialogue and critical thinking.*

About three years ago, I had developed a medical condition that required a clinical diagnosis of a specialist. I did a lot of research online and chose a doctor in my city. Upon visit, I noticed that the private clinic was very busy. The receptionist took my address, phone number, and age as a part of the registration process. After about one hour of waiting, I had a chance to meet the doctor. He spoke well, came up with a provisional diagnosis & prescribed me medicines along with a blood and urine test. I was told to follow-up with the doctor after a certain interval of time. I religiously took all my medicines and completely recovered in weeks.

Three years later I had developed a different medical condition that fell in the domain of the same physician's expertise. Impressed with his earlier line of treatment I visited him again. The same cycle of registration was repeated. When I met the doctor I greeted him 'Good morning' to which there was no response. After the consultation, he wrote the provisional diagnosis and some of his prescriptions just like last time. However, this time, at the top of the page, he wrote '*Patient irregular with follow-up.*'

This was the first time I was reading something like this. It felt similar to a remark a teacher would write on your calendar '*Your ward is irregular in class.*' It had a slight undertone of criticism of my inability to meet his ‘expectations.’ I discussed this with a few peers who had also consulted this doctor. Their best guess was that on my first visit to him three years ago, my name and phone number were registered in his database. On my visit three years later although with a different condition he was able to find out that I did not follow-up with him three years ago! After some searching, I finally found the file of my consultation three years ago and tallied it with the recent one. Both had identical registration number! Our guess was right!

I subsequently learnt that writing such remarks is actually a common practice amongst medical practitioners. On one side, this may seem as a doctor's genuine attempt to keep a record of his patient's compliance with him and his treatment. On the other, it is slotting patients as per their obedience and keeping a record of it perhaps forever without their consent. Shouldn't we be told the true purpose of taking our phone number and the possibility of it being used as an identifier of our compliance record forever? Was the phone number something even necessary to ask in the first place? True that follow-up is a good thing as the doctor can assess the progress/effectiveness of his therapeutic approach. But patients have a right to not follow-up irrespective of the outcome of the treatment. It is primarily the paying patient who wants the doctor to meet his expectation and not the other way round. Those physicians who perceive their patients merely as a source of money can use these practices to disapprove their patients in subsequent visit if they did not follow up in earlier ones.

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