

## ‘Attitude’ in patient care

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I have pondered for over four decades on an experience that I had, when Sir Harry Platt, the famed Orthopaedic Surgeon, said “Surgery is all Attitude”, only four words that encompassed an hour's lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons!

Now, an Octogenarian, as I look back, the truth of this insight becomes a reality appreciated only as one ages. Having been the beneficiary of medical care on many occasions, the truth of the Attitude of both the caregiver and the cared-for has to me run true.

One's cheerful presence and attitude are indeed essential in patient care. A caring, empathetic, and respectful attitude builds trust and comfort, which are as vital to healing as medical management itself. A positive attitude, combined with confidence and responsibility in one's care, is mentally beneficial for a patient faced with the adversity of his illness. The calm authority of the doctor's voice, its tone, and choice of words go a long way toward allaying any apprehension. Be an active listener and be able to interpret verbal and nonverbal communications well. Make sure that personal information is kept confidential so that patients feel heard, understood, and respected. Dignity and privacy of the patient are paramount to evoke trust.

While knowledge and technical skill are essential, it is the caregiver's attitude that shapes the patient's emotional well-being, compliance, and overall experience of care. Sustained interest in the patient's health status distinguishes the sincerity of the caregiver. A knowledge of one's co-morbidities when decisions have to be made on drugs, interventions, etc., would add to the personalised care and would be duly appreciated.

Patients must feel that the caregiver is resourceful in finding solutions to their ailments, irrespective sometimes of the terminal nature, they pose.

Surgical intervention calls for a different paradigm in ‘Attitude’, both from the surgeon's and the patient's perspectives.

I now think what Sir Harry Platt meant by ‘Surgery’ was not only the customary diagnostic skills, knowledge-based decision skills, and the hand skills we tend to acquire with experience. But I thought it encompassed as well a more protean group of attitudes we as surgeons acquire over the passing years. Let me enumerate a few.

The attitude of not giving up on a patient, irrespective of the difficulties encountered at surgery or sorting out the complications consequent to surgery.

The attitude of not reacting to the ‘flak’ that inevitably follows the death of a patient, irrespective of who is responsible for it.

The need for a compassionate attitude towards a patient, irrespective of how dire the circumstances are. Especially if delicate communications are needed. The reality and the responsibility one carries, that the human being under your knife has, by choice, entrusted you with his life to undertake his surgery.

These professional attitudes stood me in good stead through the latter stages of my career, since I learnt to have an insight into the wisdom of Sir Platt's words. These attitudes will augur for greater success in your life, too, as a surgeon or a physician.