

Transparent India

Empowering the common man

Trusting doctors

Aabha · Saturday, March 30th, 2013

Trusting doctors is a challenge in India. From what I have heard, India has doctors that are just as qualified as the best in the developed countries. If you have sufficient funds, there are medical facilities that match the west at your disposal as well. However, the challenge here is in trusting the doctor's intent. How do you trust that the procedure the doctor is recommending really a medical necessity or just something to make extra money.



Health insurance is a joke in India. No insurance covers out-patient treatment or exploratory tests. People game the system by making fake bills for inpatient treatments. It is indeed true that common healthcare is affordable for middle and upper class. But, it is incorrect to compare Indian medical expenses with those in the west and deduce that we have affordable healthcare. Most Indians belong not to the upper or middle class, but to the poor class. Dr. Pawan Sinha, a professor at MIT runs project Prakash with the goal of performing free eye surgeries to treat reversible blindness for poor Indian villagers. He told us that despite the free treatment, there are villages in India where people can't afford the 200 odd rupees of bus fare in order

to travel to Delhi for the treatment.

When you go to your doctor for consultation, many doctors don't really see it as a consultation - they see it as our consent to allow them to do whatever treatment they seem fit. Don't be surprised if you are proposed a treatment without any explanation. You have to push really hard to get any answers on what is wrong with you. If you want a second opinion or are not ready for doctor's proposed treatment, you will have to go through the awkward process of explaining to the doctor why you are not ready for their proposed treatment. In their defence, most doctors in India are overbooked and hence have little time for giving detailed answers to all their patients. Even if they have time, many doctors don't feel the need to explain themselves.

Even if you have taken an appointment, be prepared to wait any length of time before the doctor sees you. In many places, it seems like doctors do not show up until all patients have first gathered together at the clinic. Another thing I have observed is that doctors in India don't say "I don't know". On any visit to the doctor, you can rest assured to come out with a long prescription list without any real diagnostics. I had spent several months popping anti-allergic pills for chronic cough problem without any improvements. The problem eventually turned out to be acid-reflux, diagnosed by a doctor in US, who was willing to give me the 10 minutes needed to "listen" to me narrate my symptoms.

While it is the doctors who propose treatments, it is the nurses and compounders who administer them in most cases. The biggest concern here is to ensure they use sterile equipments. My wife once had a small cut in her finger and we went to the clinic across the street for dressing. The compounder picked up a scissors from his tray to cut the bandage and just in time, we saw there were blood marks on it. Since then, we always insist that the nurse open a new syringe / equipment tray in front of us, and on more than one occasion we have faced their wrath for this.

We go to the doctor in our times of weakness. It is a time when we can use all the confidence and comfort we can get. Finding a doctor we can trust is a big challenge. Finding a doctor who understands patient psychology is even more difficult. I am looking forward to hear other folk's experience and advice on this matter.

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