Patient Empowerment: The Doctor’s Perspective

This summary is based on:

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Who is this for?
• Medical policy and decision makers
• Medical practitioners
• The Patient Safety Council and its Secretariat

Key Messages
• Majority of doctors (91.6%) felt it was very/extremely important to be empowered.
• More than a third of doctors (36.8%) sometimes/seldom/never practised patient empowerment.
• Fewer junior doctors (50.4-60.4%) empowered their patients as compared to senior doctors (77.0-92.4%).
• Health care providers were reported to be less willing to allow patients/caregivers to make choices of care and/or participate in their care (64.2% and 59.2% respectively).
• Empowered patients are able to confer with their doctors regarding their treatment.
• Empowerment will improve patient safety.

Additional Information:

There is a need to outline the ideal practice for patient empowerment in Malaysia. A line should be drawn whereby the health care provider’s role is more of an “expert” or “partner” rather than that of “God/Demi-God”. Patients need to be empowered towards achieving patient autonomy.

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Conflicts of interest
There is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement
This document has been peer reviewed by:
Dato’ Dr. Maimunah A Hamid, Deputy Director General (Research & Technical Support), Ministry of Health, Malaysia
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This summary should be cited as:

Keywords:
Patient empowerment, patient autonomy, patient’s rights, patient safety, hospital setting, inpatient setting
Action Points for Policy Makers
- A mindset change towards empowering patient and promoting patient autonomy is essential
- Patient empowerment should be promoted from undergraduate training
- To include patient empowerment as part of Patients’ Charter
- Stakeholders should work together on this subject to identify policy options
- Future research is recommended to identify strategies and tools most suitable for our set up

Action Points for Health Care Providers
- Health care providers should strive towards inculcating the practice of patient empowerment as a work culture
- Senior clinicians should be more active in guiding and training the junior doctors in patient empowerment

Background
Patient empowerment occurs when patients actively participate in their health care management. Two main aspects in patient empowerment are access to treatment information and involvement in decision making (WHO, 2001). Effective communication and interaction between providers and patients is a prerequisite towards patient empowerment.

This study aimed to describe the opinion of MOH doctors regarding patient empowerment, the role they play and their experiences as patients.

Method
A cross-sectional study was conducted in 15 randomly selected Ministry of Health hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. This study included state hospitals, district hospitals with specialist and district hospitals without specialist. Nurse coordinators sent out self-administered structured questionnaires to all doctors in participating hospitals and collected the completed questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of three components: doctor’s opinion towards patient empowerment and patient rights (as advocated by Malaysian Medical Association), methods used to empower patients and doctor’s experience as a patient/caregiver.

Components of patient’s rights in healthcare:
1. Patient’s right to health care
2. Patient’s right to choice of care
3. Patient’s right to acceptable safety
4. Patient’s right to adequate information and consent
5. Patient’s right to redress of graveness
6. Patient’s right to participation and representation
7. Patient’s right to health education
8. Patient’s right to a healthy environment

Key Findings
Patient Rights
- More than two thirds of doctors felt that patients had full/major say in all components of their rights in healthcare except for choice of care (64.2%) and participation/representation (59.2%).
- Majority (74.9%) of doctors agreed that patient empowerment should be promoted. However, only 63.2% reported to empower their patients/caregivers often or most of the time, with a higher percentage amongst specialists/consultants.

Methods of patient empowerment
- The most common methods used to empower patients were adequate explanation (81.8%), patient education (66.4%) and counselling (64.7%).

Doctor as patient
- 91.6% of doctors felt that it was extremely or very important to be involved in decision making. However, as high as 36.8% of them sometimes/seldom/never empowered their patients, reflecting a certain degree of double standards.

Reasons against promoting patient empowerment
- Concern over readiness of patient/society (48.6%)
- Negative impact (28.6%)
- Other (22.8%)

Methods to empower patients/caregivers
- Counseling
- Patient education
- Pamphlets, reading materials, pictures
- Adequate explanation
- Encourage patients to search internet
- Audiovisual aids
- Dialogue with patients

*Multiple responses allowed