

## MAKING OUR HOSPITALS PATIENT FRIENDLY

**B Krishnamurthy \***

Some of us may be pre-destined to go through life without disease. But many are likely to fall ill and may find it necessary to go to a hospital either as an outpatient or as an inpatient. Though we are forced to do so, it is not a task that any one of us is fond of.

The following words succinctly explain this state: "Hospital patients are people whose lives have been interrupted because of a significant and often frightening medical issue. From the moment they enter that hospital door, their world changes. They are surrounded by strangers who give them instructions and warnings that they may or may not fully understand. They are inundated by noise from machinery, beeps from electronic devices, bright lights, and the bustling voices of hospital staff, while sharing a room with someone they've never met before. Even with efforts to mitigate these disruptive factors, a hospital experience is disorienting". (Excerpts from "Sick, Scared and Separated from loved ones": A report by Newyorkers for patient & family empowerment: New York public interest research group. August 2012).

It is obvious hospitals cannot be done away with. It is also well known that several aspects of the hospital are less satisfactory than they should be. Hence the authorities who manage the hospitals would do well to consider those aspects of the hospital which are abhorred by the patients and take necessary action to rectify these issues.

The first duty of a patient friendly hospital is to provide safe, effective, efficient, equitable or affordable, timely, patient oriented quality medical and nursing care. It has to do so while being ethical, legal and transparent. Hospitals are generally either "For profit" or "Not for profit" organizations. Whatever be the motive behind the running of the hospital, there is no doubt that hospitals are ultimately responsible to the community they serve and shall abide by the unwritten but commonly accepted rules of the community.

A patient friendly hospital shall never forget the fact that the patient is the most important person in the hospital and is to be treated as such. A patient friendly hospital ensures that all its staff, aided by suitable systems, practices and infrastructure, work towards providing a warm and personal human touch to the care given to patients, their relatives and other visitors to the Hospital.

It is the duty of the hospital management to ensure that every one of its employees knows that "A patient is the most important visitor on our hospital. He is not dependent on us; we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption of our work; he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider to our business; he is a part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him; he is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so." (Modified quote from Mahatma Gandhiji).

A patient friendly hospital makes known its vision, mission, quality and safety policy, its performance results and scope of services. It is necessary for the patients to know the services that are NOT available. Patients have to be informed of their rights and responsibilities and of any complaints and grievance procedure.

A patient friendly hospital shall ensure easy access to the hospital through website, telephone and road. Provision of adequate parking, well located front desk for enquiries, with informed and trained staff, well located directional and warning signages, a transparent queue system, a quick and convenient registration process and provision of help to fill up various forms are aspects that need to be considered. Provision of basic amenities like comfortable and adequate seating, drinking water and clean toilets, periodical updates on doctors' availability and possibility and reasons for any delay go a long way in ensuring patient friendliness.

---

\* Dr B Krishnamurthy, MD DA FRCA ,HOD; QMS  
Baby Memorial Hospital  
Kozhikode

A patient who comes to a hospital undergoes many processes before and while receiving medical care. Registration, appointment fixation, triaging, initial patient assessment, cross consultations, laboratory and radiology and imaging investigations, nursing, nutritional and physiotherapy assessment, care plan generation, prescription and medication administration are common processes that any patient may undergo in outpatient and emergency departments. Comfortable consultation rooms with adequate privacy, caring and informative doctors, efficient support services like pharmacy, laboratory and other diagnostics, an active patient feedback system and complaint handling system shall be necessary to satisfy out patient service requirements. It would be ideal if the hospital can reduce waiting times for sample collection, imaging and radiology services and report delivery. Single window systems help in this process.

An inpatient may undergo additional processes that include admission, invasive and non invasive procedures, intensive care, surgery, anesthesia and moderate sedation, blood and blood product transfusion. Most hopefully become better and get discharged. In others, results may not be this desirable and may need transfer to a long term facility, hospice or worst to the undertakers. Multiple interconnected processes, multiple health care workers and many managerial staff are needed to make these processes happen smoothly. In patients may need additional facilities, the more important being quick and minimal paperwork for both admission and discharge, a precise allotment of the bed and room requested, update on room availability in case of immediate non availability, adjustable visiting hours, display of do and don'ts for visitors and well displayed safety instructions.

A general consent incorporating all this shall be obtained during admission. The patients have to be appraised of the reasons for admission, the disease process, the treatment or care plan, the expected results, possible complications and expected duration of stay. The patient friendly hospital has a clearly drafted procedure for obtaining informed consent.

In India most patients will have attendants who either stay with them or stay in the hospital premises. An attendant area with clean restrooms, comfortable chairs and couches and a vending area, facilities for washing and drying of clothes, access to a pantry with coffee, instant hot water, small snacks and an assortment of hot drinks and milk, decent cafeteria food are needed for the attendants. A small but quiet garden with shady trees and comfortable chairs and an area where people can pray in silence would also add to the comforts of the attendants and patients.

It is necessary to give a written indication of expected cost of treatment. When packages are used for charging a patient, it must be clearly stated what the packages include and do NOT include. The patients who come under insurance schemes should be clearly told of the steps that will be taken by the hospital in ensuring cash less admission or claims reimbursement. The patient must be aware of his/her commitment if the claim is rejected.

A patient friendly hospital encourages its staff, patients, visitors and other stake holders to comment on its services and offer suggestions. It treats all complaints as opportunities for improvement and acts upon them. Every complaint is taken to its logical conclusion and the complainant informed of complaint closure.

A patient friendly hospital has a "Patient Safety Programme" in place and ensures all steps are taken to identify various risks faced by patients, and ensures all risk reduction activities are in place. The hospital has a mechanism in placing for monitoring of these activities and reporting of incidents. It shall act on each incident and ensure corrective and preventive action.

The patient friendly hospital shall also be environment and community friendly. It shall follow all measures to conserve resources like water and electricity and ensure its biomedical waste management conforms to prescribed local and legal standards. It shall identify common internal and external disasters that it may be subjected to and shall ensure all its staff are trained and prepared to deal with the internal or external emergency and continue to function effectively during crisis.

In summary, every hospital has to ensure that it looks after the hospital side and hospitality side of patient care. There is no doubt that hospital visits are abhorred by most patients and all efforts should be taken to reduce the discomfort associated with them. This can be done only if the organization understands that the hospital is "for the patients, by the patients and of the patients" and works diligently towards identifying their stated and implied needs. Hospital management should make specific efforts to exceed patients' expectations, monitor and correct their actions, when found to be deficient.