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PRACTICE

**Communicating
our caring
purpose**

15 February 2018

CARING | INTENTION | MEANING |
PURPOSE

our intention to care, it can elicit a powerful healing response.



I'm an anesthesiologist. Many patients imagine that I calculate a dose of drug sufficient to last the duration of the surgery, give an injection, then leave the OR. The reality couldn't be more different. How do I communicate my intention to care?

First of all, I take trouble with introductions. "Anesthesiologist" is a hard word to say and many patient won't know what the word means. The elderly, or hard of hearing, may miss my introduction altogether. Moreover, the typical patient meets many health professionals on the day of their surgery, all dressed in identical scrubs and hats. It's hard for the patient to know who you are and what your role is.

I speak in plain language and say, "I'm the doctor with the sleeping medicine."

Then I make explicit my caring purpose: 'I'm going to be in the operating room every minute of the case, watching over you, making sure that you are asleep, that you are safe, and that you wake up well afterward.'

I'm being very deliberate in my choice to words to emphasise my dedicated presence and caring. I want my patients to feel safe. Sometime I emphasise the point, saying, 'That's the **only** job I have to do, taking care of **you**.'

We know from randomised, controlled trials that when patients have a pre-op consultation that is empathetic and supportive – as opposed to just giving standard information – that patients will have much less pain, will need less analgesia, will have fewer side effects, will mobilise more quickly, have better wound healing and better surgical outcomes. Many other studies show remarkable improvement in clinical outcomes when patient feel cared for.

We also know that when health professionals clearly state their caring purpose, it transforms patient satisfaction.

The effect is even more powerful if you can relate your purpose to a patient's life goals. The physiotherapist might explain how the course of rehabilitation is totally focused on getting the patient back on his feet in time for his daughter's wedding. The eye surgeon might know about her patient's love of reading and explain how the

procedure will improve sight. The cardiac nurse might tell her patient she wants to get her patient well enough to look after the grandchildren again.

Every health professional has the opportunity to tell the patient who they are, why they come to work, what they do, and how it can make a difference for the patient. This focus on caring purpose can make a world of difference to an anxious patient and also brings greater joy and satisfaction to your daily work in the hospital or clinic; you are no longer just doing a routine job or a series of tasks – you have renewed meaning and purpose in your work.

How will *you* communicate your caring purpose? The next patient is waiting.

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“When all members of an organization are motivated to understand and value the most favourable features of its culture, it can make rapid improvements.”

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