

When to Fire a Doctor

Oakton, VA – Today's consumers are demanding; expecting choice, variety, quality of product and unequalled service. If a waiter does a poor job, it is rewarded with a small tip. Unprofessional day care providers are dismissed for a child's safety. So why is it that when it comes to healthcare – easily one of the most important things in life - patients seem willing to tolerate substandard service which would be unacceptable elsewhere?

From the moment people walk into their doctor's office, they immediately play a subservient role. The American Medical Association says that each patient waits an average of 20 minutes before their physician sees them. Once in their presence, the average doctor – specialized or not - spends just seven minutes in total with the patient and only allows a mere 18 seconds to explain the symptoms before they interrupt.

If treated that way by any other professional – a lawyer, mortgage broker or accountant – consumers would stand up and leave the office vowing to find a new person to fulfill that particular role before the end of day. But when it comes to healthcare, why is it almost expected and accepted that the person relied upon to spot cancer before it spreads, to note an early indication of heart disease or diagnose the onset of diabetes will have a bad attitude and just look at the patient as a bunch of words or numbers on a chart and not as a human being in need?

"Medicine is a service profession," says Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck, author of the book "Sacred Trust: The Ten Rules of Life, Death and Medicine" (Book Publishers Network). "It should be a humbling experience to have the chance to be a physician – not a passport to arrogance."

"I've spent my entire adult life as a physician," points out Dr. Hollenbeck, "and I hate to say it but we have far too many jerks in medicine who should have chosen a different line of work." Those strong words are coming from someone in the medical profession, which is usually associated with joining-ranks and accepting little to no criticism.

However, as her book "Sacred Trust" demonstrates, Dr. Hollenbeck has long maintained that medical consumers need to be even more discriminating about who they chose to handle their health. She goes one step further, "Many patients feel they have no power in a doctor's office," Dr. Hollenbeck says, "but in fact they hold all the power. They are employing the doctor, and have every right to, in effect, fire them if they are not satisfied with the service being provided."

With the population's life-expectancy increasing and the dramatic rise in health issues like heart-disease, diabetes and obesity showing no sign of abating, it is inevitable that the average person – or a close family member of theirs – will one day be reliant upon the skill, dedication and competence of a medical professional. When entering the examining room, Dr. Hollenbeck reminds those in need of treatment that "any kind of doctor, from a Family Physician to a subspecialist, works FOR the patient as well as with them."

Dr. Hollenbeck's believes the patient empowerment advocated in "Sacred Trust" can be the key in opening the lines of communication in the examination room, thereby, leading to a higher quality of healthcare. "Doctoring is about understanding the connection between medical science and the human spirit. From the moment the doctor opens the exam room door, people need to be put at ease so they can tell their story. As an old saying goes, 'Most men would rather have you hear their story than grant their wish.'—and the ability to correctly diagnose a patient demands it. Their life is in our hands so it's only fair that our job security is in theirs."

Finally, Dr. Hollenbeck wants people to know how to fight for MORE family physicians—and why they are declining in numbers in American medicine. "We are often a patient's first, last, and best chance—and we need to be the center of excellence in medical care."

About the Author

Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck has been a Family Physician for thirty years and is the author of "Sacred Trust". She is an honors graduate of Brown University, as well as its medical school. The product of a combined liberal arts/premedical program, she remains a shameless proponent of this type of 'well-rounded' education for physicians. She chose Family Medicine as her specialty, and her career has encompassed solo and group practice, academic teaching, and administrative leadership – with the common thread of working to make medicine do its best. Board-certified and a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians, Dr. Hollenbeck currently mothers three children, makes music, puts mind to laptop, and sees patients outside of Washington, DC. Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck's website can be found at www.hollenbeckmd.com

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