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Medicine, Yesterday and Today

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Editorial

A generation ago doctors were considered gods in white coats. Their word was accepted as law regarding how to treat disease and what a reasonable fee should be in a competitive market. Today, most medical decisions are made under government control by bureaucrats. Fees, covered procedures, medications approved, language allowed to describe medical conditions and treatments, are all subject to governmental approval.

American doctors are under siege. They are blamed for increasing costs of every area of healthcare, whether it is hospital, drug cost, medical insurance, or even non-medical insurance like auto or liability insurance. Malpractice suits may result from everything from side effects of medication to delayed healing.

Insurance companies, “managed care organizations” and government agencies, not doctors or medical schools, now control the American health system.

When I entered medicine (that's been a few years ago) physicians had an exclusive on medical knowledge. They wrote in a secret language (Latin) and used code (like “qd” for daily, “qid” for four times a day, “prn” for as needed, etc) for communication to other medical professionals, and medical journals and texts were shared only with other medical professionals.

Patients now have astonishing access to medical knowledge. With a personal computer or iPhone, anyone can access databases like Index Medicus, or web sites of leading medical institutions, and can read scientific papers on every subject from Alzheimer's to Zoster.

Medical information is out there for all to see, and to decide for themselves what course of treatment they should pursue. Unfortunately there is an overabundance of information, not all of it accurate or reliable. Further, ethical questions have been raised about the propriety of dispensing healthcare products by physicians.

Today, the American public (partly because of the Internet) is more informed and active in deciding what care they need and want.

Many people are vulnerable to promotional infomercials and newspaper and magazine advertisements that tout the “latest miracle cures”, offering exotic products promising long life, restored health and more. It is hard to know which sources of information are reliable.

For the most reliable and informative information on health and medical issues I recommend one of these sources available on the Internet: WebMD, Mayo Clinic, Harvard Health, and MIWG (Medical Information Working Group), an FDA resource.

The fact is that patients want their physicians (especially their eye-care providers, who provide contact lenses and solutions and eye care products) to advise, and frequently make available, the product they feel is best for that patient. Once the patient finds a physician that he or she trusts, it is good to be able to put healthcare decisions in the hands of that individual without interference from government or “regulators”.

Medicine—and particularly eye care—is undergoing a paradigm shift. And I, for one, welcome the thought that the patient is joining the doctor in seeking less invasive treatments and preventives like nutritional supplements rather than more expensive “crisis intervention modalities” such as surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.