

The Doctor Patient Relationship

Some relationships are regarded as highly confidential and this is one of them. Unless a patient is prepared to be completely frank with the doctor, and if necessary bare all, in every sense, proper diagnosis and treatment may be impossible. Personal and social circumstances can have a great bearing on the right approach. These may be embarrassing for the patient to discuss, as in the case of an abused wife, or child.

Clearly enormous trust is placed in doctors. Fortunately the reputation of the profession is high, despite the obvious scope for abuse. Cases of misconduct are rare.

Doctors normally command respect and many patients are happy to put themselves in their hands, accepting any advice without question. This often makes sense (the doctor is supposed to know what he is doing). It may have therapeutic value. A patient confident that the right treatment will be administered has a sense of well being that may speed recovery. Sometimes patients are so ill that they have no ability, or inclination, to do anything other than accept their treatment.

Not all patients have a passive or deferential relationship with their doctor. Indeed the recent guidance by the profession's governing body, the GMC, expressly calls for patient involvement in decisions about their care. Most people are interested in their health. A great deal of information and advice is given by many sources, such as newspapers, magazines and increasingly the internet. Media coverage of new drugs and procedures, many of which are expensive and relatively untried, can raise expectations. Doctors now have to respond to patients who are well informed and demanding.

Problems can arise. Continued.....