Prescrire International Editorial

Translated from ***Rev Prescrire*** **December 2011; 31 (338): 937**

Patients want to know

What do patients want from their primary care practitioners? Two French surveys conducted in 2009 and published in 2011 provide some interesting insights (1).

Take time to explain. A multidisciplinary team doing research on primary care looked at users' principal concerns when consulting general practitioners. They studied a varied sample of 65 persons, most of whom considered themselves healthy (1).

According to this survey, the most important aspects of care centre upon the physician-patient relationship: obtaining information on health problems and treatments; the physician's knowledge of the patient's medical history; listening; giving clear explanations (1). For the authors of the study, these findings were consistent with those of another study of 3540 patients in various European countries: patients want to play a more active role, to share in medical decisions, to understand the state of their health, and to gain more autonomy (1).

Informing patients to improve their skills. According to the French survey, patients seemed to expect a great deal from their doctors in terms of information and the acquisition of skills. However, when offering patient education to someone who has a chronic illness, physicians tend to offer advice and information aimed mainly at improving compliance with treatment, rather than providing the patient with *"skills to promote self-determination and quality of life"* (2).

Studies conducted in France and other countries show that people with chronic illnesses want *"greater recognition of their own knowledge of their disease and its self-management (...); and help with acquiring skills to enhance their personal development (...). Hence the doctor must constantly find a compromise between the patient's desire to "live well" in the present and the medical objective of preventing complications of the illness"* (2).

Less advice, more explanations! Patients seem to be looking for more explanations… and less advice. Quite a challenge for practitioners. And surely an observation that is not limited to general practitioners alone.

Prescrire

1- Krucien N et al. "Les transformations de l'offre de soins correspondent-elles aux préoccupations des usagers de médecine générale?" Irdes *Question d'économie de la santé* 2011 (163): 6 pages.
2- Fournier C et al. "Prévention, éducation pour la santé et éducation thérapeutique en médecine générale". In: Gauthier A et al. "Baromètre santé médecins généralistes 2009" Inpes 2011. inpes.sante.fr accessed 2 September 2011: 258 pages.

Downloaded from english.prescrire.org on 07/09/2026
Copyright(c)Prescrire. For personal use only.