Patients Stumbling Between Multimedia and the Real Deal

To most of us, it is unimaginable how social media has recently been the biggest influencer in shaping how people perceive the world around them, including taking decisions which affect their general well-being. Even though most of these decisions seem to be harmless, there are actual cases in which some patients take reckless decisions based on non-evidence based information they see or hear that might transform their lives upside down; which is why as dental students today and future dentists tomorrow, we need to always bear in mind that social media is a very powerful double-sided sword, and it is up to us to determine which side of it dominates for the benefit of the common.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information through any media regardless of frontiers in Article 19; and to be able to put this into practice as dentists, we need to fully comprehend and re-contextualize it in terms of our dental profession. Thus, in other words, all patients have the right to receive, process and share evidence-based information regarding their dental health in plain language, which will in turn aid them make informed decisions regarding their dental healthcare without the interference of purely business-intended, non-evidence based temptations.

In the mid-twentieth century, the interest in Patients’ right to be informed regarding their medical status and proposed treatment plan appeared in the United States. The implications of the exercise of this right reside in helping and protecting both the patient and the practitioner in terms of various aspects. First is from an ethical point of view; where patients need to clearly understand their current medical status in order to be able to make wise choices regarding their treatment approaches proposed by the practitioner, whenever applicable. Second, is from a medico-legal point of view; which protects practitioners by making patients share part of the responsibility for the decided treatment plan. Third is from a clinical point of view; since informed patients show more cooperation during treatment as well as commitment to the practitioner’s post-operative instructions, leading to increasing the success rate of the procedure. And fourth, is from a human rights point of view; where fulfillment of the patients’ right to necessary information is attained according to human rights standards and principles.

In our day-to-day practice we see patients falling into many common pitfalls, and it is our responsibility to raise as much awareness to prevent such incidents. In simple steps, we can shift the equilibrium towards disseminating adequate, evidence-based health literacy through social media; such as adopting a more humanitarian standpoint and turning ‘giving back to the society’ into a lifestyle, spreading awareness in our clinics on daily basis as well as holding regular oral health awareness campaigns, especially in marginalized and less-advantaged societies, dedicating enough time for proper history taking, assessment and treatment planning with the patients, developing the habit of taking written consents for guaranteeing patients are well-informed about the treatment course and possible outcomes, being responsible about what we share on social platforms, and last but not least, holding important positions in the future, in governmental and non-governmental organizations alike, for improving dental public health-related policies and programs.

References:

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