



Communication from the Other Side of the Bed

Daniel Rosas*

Internal Medicine, Hematology-Oncology fellow, Memorial Cancer Institute, Pembroke Pines, Florida, USA

SUMMARY

“Does your brother take any medications?” was the first thing I heard on the phone. As a physician, I knew that question was loaded with meaning and most likely it was going to be followed by bad news. I learned that my brother was involved in a car accident, leaving him with multiple injuries and was admitted to the ICU.

My parents, who had to fly from outside the country, met me at that hospital that same night where the ICU became our second home for the coming weeks. The initial days were the most agonizing. We held his hand, whispered words of encouragement, and hoped for any sign of improvement. We took turns sitting by my brother’s side, hearing all the information the treatment team had for us day by day. As an internal medicine physician, some very specific medical terms were not familiar to me. I had to continuously ask what everything meant so I could understand and subsequently translate the information in Spanish to my parents so they could be involved in my brother’s care too. I reflected on this and realized I could not stop thinking about how patients and families with no medical background hear all the medical terms, and most of the time, just nod.

Effective communication is vital in the field of healthcare, where clear and concise information can significantly impact patient outcomes, and I witnessed it first-hand. I am extremely grateful to the doctors who took the time to sit with us and explain what was going on. While medical professionals possess a wealth of specialized knowledge, it is essential to convey complex medical concepts to patients and their families in easily understandable terms.

Medical jargon and technical language can be overwhelming. By utilizing layman terms, we can empower patients by helping them comprehend their medical conditions, treatments, and procedures. When patients understand their health issues, they can actively participate in decision-making and ask informed questions. This knowledge fosters a sense of control, reduces anxiety, and enables patients and families to take an active role in the healthcare journey because they feel understood and respected. This fosters a sense of trust and encourages open dialog. Regarding translation, in multicultural societies, language and cultural differences can present significant challenges in healthcare

communication. Using layman’s terms helps bridge these barriers by simplifying complex medical information into universally understandable language. This enables healthcare providers to effectively communicate with patients from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that important medical details are not lost in translation. It promotes cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

In our case, after digesting all the information and making some decisions after it was all clear, my brother’s mind and body showed slow signs of progress. My brother’s determination, combined with the unwavering support of the medical team and our family, became the driving force behind his progress. The day we received news of his imminent discharge from the rehabilitation center was a moment of immense joy and gratitude.

Reflecting on this journey, I realized the profound impact the accident had on my entire family. We emerged stronger, cherishing every precious moment and valuing the strength that comes from unity and effort for clear communication. The most valuable lesson, I took for my own personal practice, was how layman’s terms and family communication make a higher impact on patient care than I ever thought possible. I hope that I can inspire healthcare providers to be mindful of the language that patients and families can easily comprehend so that the people on the other side of the bed can have an active role in their health.

Regarding my brother’s journey, I can happily share that as of today, he is fulfilling his dream of being an orthopedic surgeon, helping trauma patients, while providing excellent medical communication to his patients and their families. We could not be happier.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest to declare for the preparation of this manuscript.

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***Corresponding author:** Daniel Rosas, Department of Internal Medicine, Hematology-Oncology fellow, Memorial Cancer Institute, Pembroke Pines, Florida, USA

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