

Orthopaedic Connection

Tell It Like It Is

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I could have also titled the article in two other ways. How often have you heard people say, “To tell the truth” or “I’ll be honest with you”? I decided not to use those, because I hope everyone knows I am always honest and truthful with you!!

I like to think about this article in three sections. The subject “Tell it like it is” applies to any area of medicine, but of course I am putting it in the context of what I know best, Orthopaedic Surgery.

Confusing Vocabulary

Orthopaedic Surgery has its own vocabulary that is very unfamiliar to patients and family members. It is also somewhat confusing to other medical providers who are not Orthopaedic Surgeons.

Accordingly, I have always been aware of this and have attempted to put problems and procedures I am dealing with into language others can readily understand. In other words, “speak English”! I do, as most of you know who read my articles or have seen me in the office or the hospital. Perhaps I am praising myself, but many doctors do not do this.

What do you gain by “snowing a patient” in your conversation? Nothing.

Permits For Surgery Or Procedures

When patients or guardians are asked to sign a permit for something I do it is often worded somewhat technically. Here is where it gets a little tricky. Most of our surgery and procedures are worded more technically than average people understand. The permit is really a legal document giving us permission to do a certain thing to a patient so it can’t be stated in simple English (unfortunately).

This is where my avoidance of confusing vocabulary comes in. I have explained things to the patient in terms they understand before they are asked to sign the permit.

I never want someone to come back to me after surgery or a procedure saying “I didn’t understand what I signed”. Gulp. That’s a bad feeling.

Results Of Surgery Or A Procedure

Going out to talk to a family or sometimes a very large gathering of family and friends after surgery can be a challenge! It is hard to explain things to a large group, but I try.

No person or number of persons waiting wants to hear bad news. Fortunately, I don’t have to give that very often. What I try to explain is how things went.

One doctor I have known routinely told the family, “It (the surgery) was the worst one I have ever seen”. In doing that the surgeon leaves some leeway if things don’t turn out fine.

I don’t do that, because it isn’t realistic. I try to be in the middle and explain things as they are (Tell It Like It Is). I answer all questions and give encouragement and hope.

The opposite of “It was the worst one.....” is “Everything went perfectly” seeming to give a guarantee that the patient will do well.

Being in the middle I feel is the best although some families and patients get concerned if I don’t say “perfect” in the conversation.

I hope this is helpful to you in understanding what you hear from me and other physicians.

Hope to see you next week.

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Good health, good life, all the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush