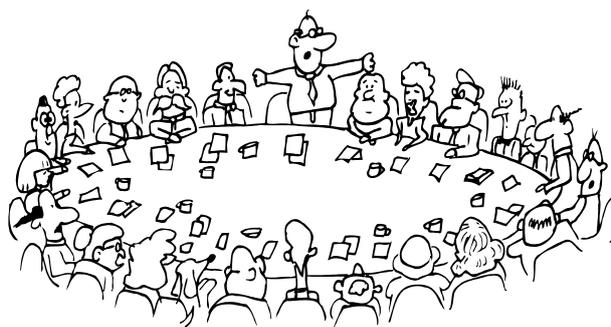

CAN WE STOP DOCTOR SHOPPING?

Thamir A. Hamdan

FRCS, Professor Orthopaedic Surgery, University of Basrah College of Medicine, Basrah; IRAQ.

Wandering around clinics and shopping doctor's opinion is a real problem nowadays, moreover, it is becoming more obvious everyday.

Certainly it has a very bad impact on the carrier and the patient in particular. Patients who wander in the clinics to buy opinions of doctors may suffer from the mistakes of them all.



Doctor shopping carries a definite risk of creating bad relations between colleagues because patients usually fabricate the message in the way they like. The outcome of treatment for those who wander in the clinics is almost always poor.

Getting so many answers for one problem will certainly confuse the patient.

Doctor shopping is usually a multifactorial problem, in our locality, the contributors are: the treating physician, the patient, the staff, the line of treatment suggested, the street propaganda, the circumstances, the health system and finally the patient's relative or friends. So to reduce or stop this growing up phenomena, we have to analyse the role of the contributors.

The patients usually adhere to the same doctor, and never ask for second opinion. When they are fully satisfied with him, their satisfaction is usually based on several points like his impressive personality, the way he deliver his answer, how he is stable on his chair, his approach in taking history and performing physical examination, his ability to make a friendship (they call him a lovely person).

Although the word adhesion is hateful in surgical practice, it is very much accepted and probably cancel doctor shopping if it occurs between the patient and his treating physician.

Prolonged interview and quiet listening is very vital for the patient satisfaction. The decision for the line of treatment should come on a solid basis, like through examination and investigation. Sympathy and empathy usually creates a strong link with patient and his relative as well. The enthusiasm for solving the patient's problem is really appreciated by the patient, they can easily discover how the treating physician are serious and honest. Other supporting points are experience, reputation, qualification and how busy he is, those with long waiting list are usually preferred by the patient.

The interest in the patient money rather than his illness is really hateful by the patient once he feels so. The doctor's reluctance in taking a sharp decision, taking decision without good reason or changing the decision in a short period of time will certainly break the link and encourage buying a second or a third opinion.

Considerable number of those who wander in the clinic have some psychiatric disorders, certainly it is very difficult to satisfy patient with psychiatric illness, they continue seeking solve for their unsolved problem which they usually hide, so they wander here and there.

Patients usually accept treatment which is easy and convenient to them if the decision taken is not suitable, so they keep knocking doors, hoping to get what they want. The patient's circumstances may play some role in doctor shopping.

Another good reason for this phenomena is the paramedical staff, the nursing staff, the relative or the patient's friends, they may interfere for a personal benefit, a personal hatefulness or they had previous good experience with certain physician, so they lead the patient to where the gold is located.

The newly evolved mode "street propaganda" which is unfortunately becoming a tradition irrespective of the patient's benefit which should come on the top of everything helps not only in doctor shopping but also in spoiling honesty of medicine.

The VIP patient constitute a particular problem, they always search for several opinions, thinking that their medical problems differs from others, or for a security reason. Unfortunately, some colleagues encourage them to use this particular line.

Patients with serious disease like malignancy or disease involving their private parts or a decision to change a self image like amputation usually wander in the clinics hoping to get a smooth answer that please them in certain way. I think they have some right to do so, so we have to accept this bitter fact.

The contradictory ideas, and lack of agreement between colleagues in the same specialty or in the same level plays a dangerous role in encouraging doctor shopping. Sadly some colleagues use the habit of "telling the opposite" thinking that by doing so they can gain more customers. They can easily understand the patient's reaction and thinking so their decision comes always in harmony with the patient desire without considering his health demand.

I think it is easy to stop this shopping by finding a better health system of referral to the specialist on certain official basis. Doctor shopping almost always means patient's dissatisfaction, or a weak doctor-patient relationship which is one of the strongest medicine on this earth. To achieve this goal we need to understand the character, the demand, the emotion, the ideas, the thinking of our patient, his relative and his friends, this can only be achieved by a prolonged interview that helps in probing the patient's brain.

Finally, to abort this unethical attitude, we need to consider the followings:

- 1- We have to gain a real confidence and trust of our patient, which is the corner stone of a good doctor-patient relationship.
- 2- We should support our colleague's decision when he is on the right line.
- 3- Psychiatric help in necessary for some wandering patient.
- 4- Once we feel that the patient is not satisfied with our decision, it might be a good idea to introduce him in a clinical conference or telling him that a second opinion will be considered too.
- 5- Raising the index of ethical reasoning certainly will solve so many problems.