

Editorial

Over the years the doctor's role in patient care is changing. The days of the paternalistic doctor-patient relationship are numbered. Doctors need to rethink their role as today, patients very rightly, wish to understand and participate in the treatment process. The Private Healthcare Facilities & Services Regulations 2006 requires doctors in private practice to maintain a high standard of practice. This includes setting up of a proper clinic space equipped with adequate medical facilities, maintenance of a proper, organized and legible medical records, providing the patient with a clear understanding of all facets of their treatment, and a system to address grievances. Part III (10). 2 and Part IV (18). 1 (a) of the regulations require private medical practitioners to inform patients of the nature of the medical condition, the proposed treatment, investigation or procedure, a detailed risk profile, and the anticipated costs. These are now mandatory prior to initiating the treatment process.

The recent Federal Court ruling on Foo Fio Na vs Dr. Soo clearly enforced the requirement by the law of the need to inform and disclose the inherent risks of medical or surgical treatment to the patient. Doctors now are compelled by their duty to inform the patient of all the significant risks, which are material to the patient in that particular situation. Failure to do so may have serious and expensive consequences.

The combination of the above Federal Court ruling and the requirements of the Regulations, will invariably increase the practice of defensive medicine, with consequent increase in the cost of healthcare services especially in the private sector where no cross subsidies exist. Patients may also take advantage of the providence of the Regulations for their own monetary gain. This is particularly true where complaints are made with the intention of achieving discounts on bills. However, legitimate complaints must be addressed quickly with sympathy and compassion.

Ironically today, the future of the private medical practice apparently rests in the hands of the law- makers. We doctors can only hope the lawmakers will bring wisdom and prudence to the task. If I am asked by a student who aspired to become a doctor, "What is the prospect of a doctor in the future?" My answer would be, "It will get tougher and tougher to practice medicine".

I take this opportunity to thank all contributors to this issue of the newsletter and the Committee Members who have given me the advice and support I needed, particularly Dr. Hafiz Law, the previous Editor, for his guidance.

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Editor.