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## The Incredible Doctor-Patient Relationship

By Dr. W. Michael Myles

As an eye surgeon, I had the opportunity in 1996 to discover the length a patient would go in trusting his physician. A cycling accident in September that year gave me a fractured clavicle for which I carried my left arm in a sling for several months. Fortunately, I missed a minimum of work due to my trauma as I discovered most of the eye exam can, if necessary, be done single-handedly. My operating duties also did not suffer as cataract surgery is carried out chiefly with the fingers and wrists. Arm and shoulder movement is not necessary nor is the upper body muscular exertion which is required in other surgical specialties. Once gowned and seated, I could do my surgery without difficulty.

One day, I arrived at the operating room after a harrowing night of gastrointestinal (GI) upset during which I spent most of my sleep hours discharging one end or the other of my GI tract. My exhaustion and dehydration were immediately apparent to the anesthetist assigned to my room, so she suggested giving me two litres of Ringer's lactate intravenous (IV) prior to starting my list. I agreed.

I strolled about the recovery area (thinking it wise to avoid the pre-operation area), pulling my IV pole with one arm, the other arm bound in a sling, hoping not to encounter any of my patients. My luck ran out shortly before the end of the second litre of fluid when I heard a puzzled and apprehensive voice ask, "Aren't you Dr. Myles?" I can only imagine the thoughts in my patient's head as he saw his eye surgeon in such a state only minutes before he was to submit to a delicate medical procedure by the supposed professional. However, to my delight, he accepted my affirmation that I was indeed feeling quite well enough to undertake his surgery and that my appearance need not worry him. Happily, his case and all the others that day were completed successfully.

As physicians, it is easy to take for granted that our patients trust us. But on that particular day in 1996, I would have understood my pre-surgical patient turning tail and running. To his credit he did not, and I was humbly reminded of the depth and strength of this thing that we call the doctor-patient relationship. *Dx*

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