

Knowledge Is Power

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... and Why The Current Medical Model Fails Everyone.

The medical and insurance worlds both claim that health promotion and "wellness" are the key to cutting health care costs and fostering an overall improvement in the health and well-being of our aging population. Health care practitioners speak of wellness and "empowerment". The insurance industry has a desire to cut the costs associated with long-term illness and has (to some degree) started to reimburse for some very basic elements related to self-care.

Unfortunately, the reality is that much of this is talk ... and as they say, talk is cheap.

"Empower" has become a societal buzz word. The American Heritage dictionary defines this word as "to give power or authority to; authorize, especially by legal or official means". But it also points out the following:

"Its modern use originated in the civil rights movement, which sought political empowerment for its followers ... The Usage Panel has some misgivings about this recent broadening of usage. For the Panelists, the acceptability of the verb empower depends on the context ... in contexts that are not political the Panel is markedly less enthusiastic ... The Panel may frown on this kind of psychological empowering because it resonates of the self-help movement, which is notorious for trendy coinages."

Is it pop culture phraseology that we seek? I suspect not.

What is involved in the process of true "wellness" is self-responsibility - and, ultimately, self-care. This isn't fostered by an "us vs them" mentality - an "I will tell this to you and you will do it" mentality. It's not about simply offering services that promote wellness. It IS about creating an open mentoring environment that fosters learning and self-responsibility.

As health care practitioners, we will always be involved in the care of acute issues - there is no doubt of this at all. But to truly address the overall well-being of the community, we must be integrally involved in fostering a learning environment. This is far deeper than simply "teaching" or offering "wellness services". It involves a buy-in by not only the medical community but also the reimbursement world. Practitioners need to look at effective means of facilitating a patient's knowledge base and the subsequent application of these strategies of self-care. The insurance world either needs to stand behind this - or not - simply put. It involves an evidence-based approach - or more so an evidence-based educational approach.

It also involves restoring faith in the consumer - that they will in fact be given good, science-based information that will assist them, mentor them, in their own well-being. For years, the consumer has had less desire to use the medical system - it's too expensive, they don't listen to me, I went to so-and-so for months and didn't get better, etc etc. As a community, we need to strive to re-gain the consumer's confidence in the system - which, at this juncture in time, is severely lacking (and perhaps rightfully so).

Knowledge is, indeed, power ... the power to be healthy, to sustain lifelong growth, to engage in self-care for the most elemental health care issues ... and the ability to actively participate in self-care strategies for acute and chronic medical issues should they arise. We are at a crossroads - perhaps one of the greatest opportunities in our recent history to truly make a difference in the world as we know it. Let's avoid the "lip service" and get on with making a difference.

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