

Book Review

The Intelligent Patient's Guide to the Doctor-Patient Relationship: Learning How to Talk so Your Doctor Will Listen

Written by Barbara M. Korsch, MD and Caroline Harding
Oxford University Press, NY, NY \$17.95

Reviewed by Judith A. Greenfield, PhD, RN
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What should you say if you think you will have trouble taking your medication the way your doctor wants you to? Or if you can't remember what the medication is supposed to do and how it relates to your illness. Dr. Korsch, a pioneer researcher in the field of doctor-patient communication, answers these and many other questions that patients may have about talking so their doctors will listen.

In writing this book, Dr. Korsch draws not only on the knowledge she has gained from her many years of research, but also on her own experiences as a physician and a patient. Yes, as a patient! And when we read the stories, she shares, of some of her own experiences, we see that being a doctor does not always place her at a greater advantage when she finds herself in the role of patient. We see that she, too, has experienced visits where she leaves the doctor's office feeling frustrated, angry and, in one instance, "brutalized".

But Dr. Korsch *is* a doctor. As a result, she can and does present a balanced view of doctor-patient interactions. In fact, she begins the book by showing us the different perceptions doctors and patients have of the same experiences. Her purpose in doing this is not to show us that one is always right and one is always wrong, but rather, to show us that the first steps to building good relationships and communication are to build understandings of where doctors are coming from, where we as patients are coming from, and how the medical setting affects us both. In her own words:

A better understanding of all these things should liberate you to make the best possible use of your opportunities when you see your doctor (pg. 19).

Throughout the book, Dr. Korsch provides us with snippets of actual patient-doctor experiences that allow us to build these understandings. She also provides us with clear examples of how to speak with our physicians – about medications, treatment decisions, expectations about truth telling (if the news is bad), and more. When doctors seem unresponsive to our worries, for instance, she tells us what we can say to help them understand. As such, this is a highly insightful and useful book – one which, though

meant to help patients get the most out of their interactions with doctors, should also help any doctor who reads it.ف

Judith A. Greenfield is contributing editor of the *Healthcare Communication Review* and President of the Healthcare Communication Project, Inc.

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