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S U C C E S S S T O R Y

“Challenging a doctor can be done appropriately and nonabrasively.”



Being Patient

Phyllis Julian
Knoxville, Tennessee

“A few months ago I received a frantic call from my husband in the hospital. His doctor was threatening to send him home if he continued to argue about potential treatments. My husband had been admitted through the emergency room only two days before, and I did not see him coming home as an option.

“My husband is an award-winning salesman and normally an excellent communicator, so I was fully prepared to fire back at the doctor with both barrels on his behalf, but the 10-minute drive to the hospital gave me time to evaluate what was really happening. I realized I needed to listen to the doctor and find out what exactly caused him to reproach my husband. After all, he was the professional, and my husband’s life was in his hands! →

Being Patient

Phyllis Julian
Knoxville, Tennessee

“Experience had taught me that physicians can have days with multiple crises, and often the tension overflows onto other patients. I remembered that doctors are still human. I knew the doctor had very likely taken offense because he believed my husband was challenging his medical expertise.

“When I arrived, I could tell that my husband was having an adverse reaction to medication and was indeed not himself. A dual-medication treatment had been administered while awaiting test results. When my husband realized he was feeling and behaving strangely, he had insisted the treatment be stopped, which, not surprisingly, annoyed the entire medical staff. His panic-attack-like reaction to the medication eroded his ability to explain the problem to the staff.

“When the doctor was paged, I was not surprised to see a scowling man in a white lab coat flurry into the room. After calmly introducing myself and expressing appreciation for his extra time, I explained what I saw happening and then rephrased my husband’s questions. My goal was to reopen communication lines by establishing a mutual purpose (my husband’s health) and reestablishing dialogue. I explained that my husband was not deliberately being uncooperative and assured the doctor we had every confidence in his abilities. Using contrasting skills, I stressed that we were not refusing treatment or being argumentative, but we wanted and needed his evaluation of this dilemma before proceeding.

“After a few moments of silence, the doctor’s face softened a bit. The frustration and anger dissolved, and we established a rapport that really made the difference between life and death. The doctor determined he could administer a single medication and eliminate the reaction. My husband has since recovered as much as he can from the problems which sent him to the hospital.

“Years ago, I would not have achieved such a positive outcome—I didn’t have the skills I do now. These crucial skills have almost become second nature by necessity. My husband is disabled, and medical conversations are frequent in our lives. Many patients are afraid to challenge doctors when they can and should do so. However, patients must understand to a reasonable degree what is going on, and, most importantly, they must be proactive in their own care. Challenging a doctor can be done appropriately and nonabrasively.”



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—Phyllis Julian



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