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The good news is we were able to calm her down and get her flare-up under control pretty quickly. But she still has a lingering fear that "something else" might be horribly wrong. She is now trying to get approved for an EMG of her middle back to rule out her sister's passing diagnosis of nerve damage. With all the good we had done, it only took one comment to shake the foundations of her faith in the care we provided.

People often are very gullible. If you give them the information in a way they want to hear it, you can sell almost anything. That is not always best. While it's important to clearly explain your findings and the rationale for your plan of care, realize that you usually are talking to someone in pain. Don't abuse that leverage to force unnecessary care or products down someone's throat.

Another example that has been an issue in my state in the past involves selling multi-level products. There was a case a few years ago in which a local medical doctor had a big following with his vitamin products. After all, they were prescribed by the doctor, they were good for you, and they were conveniently shipped right to your doorstep every month. Woo-hoo, sign me up! Then it came out the doctor was only selling one brand of a multi-level product company. He was signing up his patients to his downline. That can be very good for business, but the big question raised was whether he was prescribing vitamins for the patients' benefit or solely for the secondary gain. Ouch! That is not a good place from which to try to defend your patient care. The issue made a big splash in several papers, and the articles targeted how he abused his position as a physician to sell products for secondary gain.

It all comes back to communication. Take the time to talk to your patients. If you are too busy to spend time to adequately explain your care, then you are too busy. I have talked to patients about why I think they should pursue conservative care instead of surgery for carpal tunnel.⁴ I had to take the time to explain how the median nerve can be irritated at other places besides the carpal tunnel and why I don't think surgery will help them. Yes, I do sell vitamins and products in my office, but I take the time to explain why I believe it will help a patient at that time.

So, what have we learned? As practitioners, we strive to be compassionate listeners to our patients. They have real questions and concerns, and they often look to us for answers. They get a lot of other information fed to them from sources that, right or wrong, don't agree with what we tell them. Recognize this up front, confront the other opinion and explain why you don't agree. Cover your bases. There is no single modality that will meet the needs of every patient. Given your personal experiences, you may or may not like this or that technique. You may not wish to pursue some specialized therapy. Make sure you are open-minded enough to recognize when a patient may not be responding to your plan of care and when you should be referring for co-management with a competent para-practitioner.

Next, patients are different, and their individual needs are different. So every patient should be evaluated and treated on the grounds of what is best for them. Finally, you should recommend what you feel to be the most appropriate care plan, regardless of what insurance covers. If your care is limited by a plan contract or by a patient's choice to only receive services covered by their plan, you still are obligated to share with them your recommendations and document why those treatments are not being pursued.

Make sure you know why you do the procedures you do. Make sure your patients know you're working to meet their needs. Be known for offering the highest level of patient care - don't settle for anything less.

References

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