

## Murtagh's Patient Education



**Author: John Murtagh**

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### تعليم المريض حسب طريقة مرتاغ

المؤلف: جون مرتاغ

**H**AVE YOU EVER WISHED FOR QUICK ACCESS to information to promptly acquaint yourself on your sickness before venturing to a doctor office? Another question, if you are a doctor, have you ever run out of words when describing diagnosis and treatment to your patients or sometimes wished to consolidate your health education to your patient in writing? If you have said yes to any of these questions, you share the vision of John Murtagh's volume, *Patient Education*, first published in 1992 and now into its fifth edition. The problem with this type of compilation is deciding what to include and what not to include since there are a myriad of medical conditions. The author tells us he started to polish his skills in 1979 when he was involved in producing patient education pamphlets for the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. The current volume reflects such an evolution and includes descriptions of 223 conditions all duly updated to reflect any twist or turn in the field.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is a collection of explanations of common medical problems with colourful titles from how to make your marriage work to bedwetting. The seven sections of part one carry all the essential information on different conditions. The ailments are arranged with developmental milestones in mind, from cradle to grave. The second part covers

general health problems with ailments from hangovers to vertigo.

Forget Wikipedia, as the information in there is often written by unknown experts, while there is a lot of gibberish in Google search. This volume contains explanations for patients and carers of common medical problems and neurological and psychiatric conditions likely to be seen in the primary care setting. Each condition is nicely presented in a single page and, depending on the nature of the condition, images, figures and tables are also featured with an emphasis on simplicity and non-technicality. Recommended literature is also included for those interested. John Murtagh has aimed to provide general practitioners or, for that matter, anyone who dispenses health care, with a handy book on common medical conditions, so that patients can be educated about their illnesses.

Should the doctor in Oman get hold of this volume? The answer is emphatically yes though some coverage on psychosocial conditions such as circumcision, issues related to adolescent and more mundane ones such as bereavement needs to be adapted to our local context. Despite some minor misgivings from a cross-cultural perspective, the relevancy of this volume goes beyond an A4 page description of each condition.

First, in medical education as well as in clinical communication and medical ethics, the trends are to

follow a patient-centered approach requiring doctors to work with patients as partners. The doctor and the client should agree on diagnosis, treatment and prevention, the aim being to bestow some responsibility on the patient which can be a catalyst for self-improvement. The traditional, paternalistic doctor-patient relationship where the doctor determines, from his or her perspective, what is best for the patient is increasingly out of favour in this age of quality assurance and patient consent. Medical practitioners in the region should wake up to the reality that the new colloquialism for doctor is *hakim*. This term describes a doctor as a teacher who imparts knowledge, a view widely held during the golden age of Islamic medicine, but one that has ceased to be in force in more recent times.

Secondly, in parallel with the concept of *hakim*, in modern medicine it has been increasingly recognised that there is a direct relationship between patients' understanding of their own illness and the resultant coping mechanisms. The assumption is that each patient carries his own 'doctor' inside him and it is up to the health care practitioners to awaken such a capacity. By enabling the patient to become a 'doctor', each sufferer can achieve a great degree of control over his or her illness. Such self-advocacy skills have the net benefit of heighten-

ing patients' satisfaction with medical services and their compliance and adherence to treatment protocols which, of course, often results in better health outcomes. This volume aims to educate patients about their illnesses. In the end, isn't it the person who experiences the disease who knows best? This is especially true in a world where patients are now seen as consumers with choices.

The intended audience of this volume is patients via their family doctors. The volume is a must-have volume for medical students, all medical practitioners and, for that matter, any inquisitive mind. Each ailment is described without the jargon often common in medical texts. The book provides the protocol that doctors can use in their clinical settings. In addition to describing illnesses, preventive health advice, some self-help tips for compliance and alternative interventions and the broad field of health promotion are all clearly covered in A4 pages that can be easily photocopied.

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