

Are physicians too rude?

Whither the good-natured physician with the Norman Rockwell smile?

Doctors attending the annual meeting of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada last month were asking that question after learning that by far the most common complaint against physicians is rudeness to patients. Meanwhile, one of the country's leading bioethicists says she's horrified by the "sense of entitlement" that is now prevalent among Canada's medical school students.

This arrogance is partly the product of a lack of recognition of the importance of "role-modelling" as an integral element of a physician's education, Dr. Nuala Kenny, chair of the Department of Bioethics at Dalhousie University, said in an interview. Kenny, who delivered the Royal College Lecture, said younger physicians often witness more seasoned colleagues acting short-tempered or using derogatory language. And like

abused children who later become abusers, "if that's what you've learned, often that's what you've become."

Kenny added that medical school curricula and CME programs pay little more than lip service to ethical instruction, and even though notions of "compassion, truthfulness, humility, and altruism" are generally found in the rhetoric of medical education, "it's not in the life experience."

Dr. Dennis Kendel, registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, said the gap between a physician's and a patient's perception of the quality of care received seems to be widening as patients become increasingly savvy about treatment options at the same time as physicians face more stress because of heavier workloads. And this stress may be leading directly to patient complaints. In an interview, Kendel said an element of rudeness is now reported in a "very high proportion" of all complaints his college receives.

In the current environment "some physicians seem to become less tolerant of any sense of disagreement between themselves and patients. And yet there ought to be room for healthy discussion. If a physician recommends a certain approach and a patient is disinclined to follow that, that shouldn't necessarily result in the physician saying 'it's my way or the highway.' That's increasingly what we're finding, that patients find themselves dismissed from practices because they didn't acquiesce completely to whatever the physician recommended."

Kenny argued that medical education must evolve to include a more profound understanding of the issues that surround all health care encounters. "It may be your 50th trauma victim this week," she said, "but for the person who is injured it will raise profound questions," including doubts about the efficacy of different types of treatment. — *Wayne Kondro, Ottawa*

PULSE

Getting physical: men more likely to begin, sustain exercise

The Statistics Canada National Population Health Survey for 1994/95 and 1998/99 revealed that men were more likely than women to begin and sustain moderate physical activity. Young men and women (20–34) had the highest odds for beginning to be physically active of any age group.

The odds of women becoming active increased with education level, but the same was not evident among males. Men who were former smokers or had moderate or high social involvement had significantly greater chances of becoming active. The odds of women becoming active were significantly lower

if they were overweight or were parents with children under age 18.

For both sexes, a moderate or high sense of control increased the odds of remaining active. Also, higher levels of education for both men and women were predictors of whether moderate levels of physical activity would be continued.

There were some differences in the factors affecting sustained activity in men and women. Women who were 35 to 64 had greater odds of succeeding than those in other age groups. Women who were not overweight also had a greater chance of maintaining sustained activity. In contrast, men had higher odds if they had either never smoked or had quit smoking. Past smoking status was not a significant factor in maintaining activity among women. Women who had good to excellent health had higher odds of maintaining activity, but health status played no significant role among men. — *Lynda Buske, lynda.buske@cma.ca*

