The critical care doctor as communicator

Dilip R Karnad comments on H R Bawaskar’s account

Being in charge of an ICU, I have some experience in dealing with situations similar to that described by Dr Bawaskar. Sudden development of a potentially fatal illness in a healthy person can be very disturbing to the relatives, especially if the patient happens to be young. In such a situation, the observations about the illness by the doctor who sees the patient first are vital. Invariably the family doctor who knows the family and their health problems over several years, is called first. When this trusted person comments on the prognosis, it is better received than when a doctor who has seen the patient for the first time talks of the possibility that the patient may not survive the illness. Diseases which could develop suddenly include cardiac arrhythmias, subarachnoid haemorrhage, polytrauma, pyogenic meningitis, malignancy presenting for the first time after widespread metastasis and severe infections like falciparum malaria.

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Face to Face

Medical technology allows physicians to act as if we no longer need to talk to patients. A patient comes in with back pain, and our MRI will show if it is real (“real” here means “surgically correctable”). Another presents with chest tightness and our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. ... I do not question the importance that our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. ... I do not question the importance that our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. ... I do not question the importance that our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. ... I do not question the importance that our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. ... I do not question the importance that our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. ... I do not question the importance that our catheters and nuclear medicine scans will tell us if the problem is in the heart or in the head. 