

Medical Second Opinion

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If I were to say that Medicine is no different from many other subjects in that it goes through fashions, I wonder if this would surprise most patients? And if I were to go on to say that clinical medicine, that is medicine as actively applied to patients, is only in part a science-would non-practitioners (or patients) again be taken aback?

Up until the 70's virtually every new-born male in the USA was circumcised, and virtually every child with a twice or thrice repeated throat infection, had their tonsils and adenoids removed. By the 90s this was no longer the case. Some of the reasons that the first was no longer practiced probably had to do with the growing diversity of beliefs and customs in a growing population. The reasons for the latter, the existence of more sophisticated antibiotics, and the thought that these organs may have had play in the early immune system of a child. Perhaps to make the point of changing medical modes even clearer the practice of a frontal lobotomy not in the least uncommonly done for severe depression was virtually abandoned by the 1950s.

In the last few years most Patients undergoing elective surgery are not required to get a second opinion about the advisability of having the surgery. Prior to this it was mandated in writing, and failing this the medical insurance carried by the patient was relieved of having to pay for the procedure. (To be clear, elective surgery includes all procedures except those in which the life or limb is threatened.) Could it then be put that the fashion for second opinions had become 'outmoded'?

In my view, and I think many other surgeons, the deletion of a second opinion prior to major elective surgery by most insurers to say the least, is truly unfortunate, and to be more explicit, as far as the patient contemplating such a procedure is actually unwise.

Most people contemplating a major purchase seek the advice of an expert. Let's say prior to purchasing a car or house, or even a major kitchen appliance. Could one find anywhere someone who would say their health and or welfare is any less vital than one of these? So how much more advantageous a second surgical or even medical opinion?

Many who are faced with let us say a total knee or hip replacement, realize that it's a major surgical procedure, and that it only makes sense to get as much information about it, such as a second opinion as to its need or advisability from an expert.

A second surgical opinion is best rendered by another surgeon in the same field. An Orthopedic Surgeon should be sought for a patient contemplating a joint replacement, a general surgeon about an abdominal procedure, a brain surgeon about a cranial procedure, a medical expert for a major change in approach to a serious medical problem, and so on.

The medical code of ethics prohibits the second surgeon (or any physician) from soliciting the patient to perform the procedure himself (to his own scalpel or practice). But is able to give a lot of information about the procedure. By booking the second opinion the patient has provided himself with a surgeon's or physician's time, therefore as the 'medical expert' and he would be reimbursed as for any first patient visit

In recent years, much has been written or promulgated on line about the importance of "Patient information". The sources of such information must certainly be congratulated or admired for the understanding of much Patient physician communication and exchange. I

would like to add that in my own practice I found that a well- informed patient was as I have repeatedly insisted converted into a junior partner in the procedure, and inevitably had a positive impact on the outcome of the surgery.

In a recent television program on a primary broadcasting station it was suggested that a second surgical opinion was, all things considered, a good thing to obtain. As an orthopedic surgeon, who has performed numerous joint procedures, I would almost hope that they might once again be made mandatory. But certainly can only urge even more strongly the importance and value of seeking a second surgical/medical opinion.

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