

THE HEALTH CONSUMER'S CODE OF CONDUCT

Consumerism and “rights talk” have transformed our society. This change is no more evident than in the doctor–patient relationship, which has developed from a largely paternalistic association into a partnership respecting the autonomy and rights of the patient.

These rights include the right to full information and to make informed decisions; the right to determine or refuse treatments; and the rights to confidentiality, courtesy, respect and responsive services.

But has consumerism swung the rights pendulum too far? Carolyn Wilson, a Canadian legal scholar, in her essay, *Seeking a balance: patient responsibilities in institutional health care*, notes that “Rights talk for patients is alive and well...”, but “duties talk is sadly missing, especially when it comes to their application to patients.”

With patient autonomy come patient responsibilities. Logically, these should be at the core of a health consumer's code of conduct. Patient responsibilities, as advanced by Wilson, include

- maintaining a healthy lifestyle;
- being honest in disclosing health information and medications being taken;
- compliance with agreed therapy and follow-up;
- taking responsibility for decisions about and the consequences of non-compliance;
- raising doubts and asking questions;
- and maintaining a stable and long term association with the treating doctor.

For too long the rights talk of health consumerism has concentrated on the consumer, and it is time for a new focus. We should recognise patients' responsibilities as well as their rights.

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