

Clever patients can be difficult for doctors



Being gifted is something that expresses itself in all areas of life – including doctors' consulting rooms. Someone who is gifted often sees himself as 'different' and is seen and treated by his environment as different as well. Gifted people can be difficult patients to a doctor because of their critical attitude and high expectations. They often see in an instant what's not going well and notice very quickly when the doctor is unsure. They ask profound questions and often start discussions. This can sometimes lead to a debate over who is right or even to the withdrawal of the patient. This can endanger the timely determination of a good medical diagnosis.

Differences between average and gifted patients

When you are gifted, it could be wise to discuss this in some way with your doctor. It's important to be tactful about this, to prevent it from being irritating. For many doctors, being gifted doesn't seem medically relevant. They will generally not consider this in their diagnosis and treatment.

First of all, you need to realise that the way you prefer to communicate is probably very different from what the doctor is used to with his other patients. Gifted people are usually much more detailed in describing their complaints and symptoms. A completely different world can lie behind their symptoms and the information they need may also be completely different from that required by people of average intelligence. They often also want to speak with their doctor on the same level, but find that their doctor isn't used to this. Because of their sensitivity, many gifted people seem to notice physical symptoms at an earlier stage, perceive more subtle symptoms and are able to describe them in more detail than people of average sensitivity. They also see more relationships between different issues. These characteristics can sometimes lead unnecessarily to insecurity.

Gifted people only form a small percentage of a doctor's patients. This gives him little opportunity to gather experience of them. That's why you yourself have to indicate where your needs lie. In the frame below are a number of recommendations, based on the experiences of a large number of gifted people.

Complaints or trouble adjusting?

In a number of ways, giftedness can play a part in the complaints you have when going to see a doctor. For example, you could be having general complaints – like tiredness, head aches, dizziness and sleeping and concentration problems – that are difficult to link to a specific cause. These can be caused by stress or trouble adjusting or conflicts related to being gifted. Such complaints may also look like the symptoms of mental or psychiatric disorder, but that may not be the case.

Gifted people often report different reactions to medication; they experience effects that are too strong or too weak, and stronger or relatively rare side-effects. Unfortunately, no research on this has been done yet.

When these kinds of problems are not recognised, people can get stuck in a negative spiral and their complaints worsen. When being gifted is taken into consideration in the treatment approach, many problems and complaints can be interpreted differently and dealt with in a more effective manner. This is a way that your doctor can help you get better that includes dealing with your giftedness.

Recommendations

Presenting your complaints

- Be assertive, but don't subject your doctor to a cross examination. This will increase the likelihood that the consultation will go the way you would like it to.
- Describe your complaints as specifically as how long you've had them and in which way they hinder you. However, avoid adding conclusions to this yourself.
- Always stay polite, even if you feel that your doctor isn't giving your story enough attention.
- If you feel emotional about something, then don't be afraid to show it; you don't always have to be rational.

Ask questions

- Prepare your questions and try to make them open questions ('How does this work..?' and 'What is...?'). When asking closed questions, it's less easy to get a good dialogue going and there is a chance that you will be met with a lot more resistance.
- Ask if you're allowed to ask questions and, if necessary, add that you always feel a need for in-depth information. Also ask if you can ask questions that occur to you later (for example, by telephone or by sending an email).
- If you're not happy with the answers, continue to ask questions very calmly and, if necessary, ask where you can find more information yourself. Indicate also that you've listened to your doctor's replies by paraphrasing them.
- Don't presume to know what your doctor knows about being gifted and its relevance to your case, but investigate this. After you've done so, you can present your own opinions and insights, and refer him to literature or the IHBV website if you need to.

Explaining giftedness

- If you find it relevant for your consultation with the doctor, you can explain about your specific characteristics that are relevant in this case.
- It's not always a good idea to use the word 'gifted' immediately. Start by explaining, for example, that you have a great need for information about your illness, that you are easily distracted by sounds around you or that you have more than average side-effects from medication.
- If you think further explanation is required, you could then mention the word 'gifted' and refer your doctor to the website of the IHBV for more information.

If you really can't communicate with this doctor

- A good relationship with your doctor is very important. If you feel you can't connect with this particular individual, try to find out if it's possible to change doctors. Take the time to investigate and find a doctor that fits you.