

More of Our Conversation with Sheldon Feldman

By Judith A. Greenfield, PhD, RN

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REVIEW:

What do you tell students and residents about communicating with patients?

SF: Surgery is such a tremendous opportunity to use communication in a positive way. I encourage students and residents to think about the connections they make with patients. For example, they will come up in conversations at the next Thanksgiving Dinner. Family and friends will ask, 'What did the doctor say?'

[Surgical] patients are very vulnerable at that time and we are asked to establish relationships with them when we don't know them very well. How to communicate with them? As a surgeon you can do well, can do good, with your words. More distressing is the damage that can be done. Words can be sharper than the sharpest scalpel. Once words come out you can't erase them. It's branding. As I work on my own skills, I find it very challenging. Blunders can happen. It's hard – a life-long process. But, for me, it's a very satisfying part of the journey.

REVIEW: Why is it satisfying?

SF: You can take the doctor-patient relationship to another level. For me to be able to communicate clearly with patients – my openness and to have patients really hear that and use it as they go through life and change their lives – is very satisfying as a human interpersonal experience.□

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