

Chaperones and plastic surgery practice in India

Sir,

In this era of legal and ethical tangles involved in medical practice, documentation as has often been highlighted is paramount. The presence of chaperones during intimate physical examination (especially if the patient is of opposite sex) is routinely followed in most centres. The chaperoning policy is influenced by a few medico-legal cases, where doctors, nurses or occasionally patients have behaved inappropriately and such instances are only highlighted by our gossip happy media. The US and British medical associations have the policy of offering chaperones to the patient before examination.^[1-3] General guidelines are as follows.

- Female doctors should offer a chaperone to all. In most of the cases, the patient will indicate this is not necessary.
- Male doctors should offer a chaperone to all men. Again, in most of the cases, the patient will indicate this is not necessary.
- Male doctors should have a chaperone when they examine female patients. If a patient objects, they should ascertain the reasons why and consider whether a female colleague should perform the examination.^[4]

Such guidelines though effective still have glaring lacunae. Such guidelines are lacking in Indian medico-legal documents.^[5] The mere presence of a chaperone is insufficient unless his/her name is documented in the chart. A simple method of doing it is by having a seal which has the Chaperone's signature indicating his/her presence during the examination. Such documentation adds substance in

cases of misbehaviour. This is a simple method to prevent false accusations by patients. Such simple methods should be inculcated into teaching medical students during their clinical training and should become a routine practice.

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