

Interview Dr. Henry Marsh: Considerations about patient-centered care

Entrevista Dr. Henry Marsh:
considerações sobre o cuidado centrdo no paciente

Interview with: Dr. Henry Marsh

“If we are ill and in hospital, fearing for our life, awaiting terrifying surgery, we have to trust the doctors treating us – at least, life is very difficult if we don’t. It is not surprising that we invest doctors with superhuman qualities as a way of overcoming our fears. If the operation succeeds the surgeon is a hero, but if it fails he is a villain.” The testimony of the neurosurgeon Henry Marsh, who has been working for more than three decades at St. Georges Hospital in England, is at the preface of his book “Do No Harm – Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery”. Launched last year in Brazil and in 2014 in England, it was voted one of the best books by The New York Times, the Financial Times, the Washington Post and The Economist.

Dr Marsh has spoken with exclusivity to Acred Magazine. Check out!

CBA Team

Journalists:

Alessandra Eckstein

Writer and Reporter - SB Comunicação. Rio de Janeiro. Brasil. E-mail: alessandra@sbcomunicacao.com.br

Cristina Miguez

Coordinator of Journalism - SB Comunicação. Rio de Janeiro. Brasil. E-mail: cristinamiguez@sbcomunicacao.com.br

CBA - Why did you decide to write “Do No Harm – Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery”?

Dr. Henry Marsh - I wanted to give an honest and accurate account of what it is really like to be a brain surgeon. I think most patients when facing major surgery are already frightened. Patients must trust doctors and the best basis for trust is honesty so, paradoxically, a book such as mine might help patients.

CBA - In the preface of your book, you wrote: “You must learn to be objective about what you see, and yet not lose your humanity in the process”. How close the surgeons are to losing their humanity?

Dr. Henry Marsh - This is very variable but it is very easy to lose your humanity and it is something one must struggle against throughout your career.

CBA - You also wrote that “Doctors are human, just like the rest of us. Much of what happens in hospitals is a matter of luck, both good and bad; success and failure are often out of the doctor’s control.” How to adopt the WHO recommendations for a Safe Surgery can help achieve the success of a surgery?

Dr. Henry Marsh - The WHO check-list is useful but only if it is used properly - no castle is stronger than the soldiers defending it. The morale of doctors and nurses is of immense importance. There is always a risk that paperwork and regulation will create an atmosphere of distrust of medical staff and this can have a bad effect on morale, motivation and the feeling of personal responsibility for patients which are such an important part of healthcare.

CBA - Why do doctors resist adopting the check list and the time out, which are safe surgery protocols recommended by WHO and the Joint Commission International? Is it possible to change this behaviour?

Dr. Henry Marsh - Surgeons are most likely to resist - they see it as a threat to their authority and an uncomfortable reminder of their fallibility. It is better if each surgical department designs its own checklist so that all the department have ownership, rather than the off-the-shelf WHO checklist which does not apply to surgical departments like mine where all the staff know each other.

CBA - How important is it for a Hospital to adopt and monitor a safe surgery program?

Dr. Henry Marsh - Very important, but only as a part of a wider programme to make sure your surgical staff (doctors, nurses, physios etc) all feel that they belong to a team and are valued.

CBA - “A brain surgeon’s life is never boring and can be profoundly rewarding but it comes at a price.” What price is that?

Dr. Henry Marsh - The pain when patients suffer at your hands, the pain of making mistakes.

CBA - “Despite all this technology neurosurgery is still dangerous, skill and experience are still required as my instruments sink into the brain or spinal cord, and I must know when to stop”. How and when surgeons realize it’s time to stop instead of going further on a surgery?

Dr. Henry Marsh - No simple answer to this. You learn from bitter experience. Severe brain damage (such as Persistent Vegetative State) can be worse than death - in particular for the patients’ families.

CBA - In your book, you mention that the week before a new surgery, you had had a bad experience with a young woman, that had one of her sides paralyzed, and it made you suffer “from severe stage fright”. Is this kind of fright important for the surgeon minutes before a surgery?

Dr. Henry Marsh - I think feeling anxious before major surgery is healthy and normal for surgeons. If you are too confident and relaxed you are more likely to make mistakes.

CBA - Which are your recommendations for a young brain surgeon?

Dr. Henry Marsh - First, don’t do it unless you absolutely have to. In second place: remember you are there to be of service to the patient and not to your ego.

*Realizada em: 08/2017.
Publicado em: 25/08/2017.*