



MANITOBA INSTITUTE
FOR PATIENT SAFETY

Make It Personal: Interview Series

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An Interview with Dennis Maione

For this “Make It Personal” column, I had the pleasure of meeting Dennis Maione, a patient safety advocate whose messages are informed by his experiences in the health care system as a cancer patient and survivor. His formal advocacy roles include involvement with Patient Safety Canada, and in storytelling through writing and speaking.



Health Care Heroes and Villains

The most powerful metaphor Dennis uses to talk about patient safety is that of health care heroes and villains. For Dennis, a health care hero is someone that who treats him like a person with a problem, rather than seeing him as a problem. Dennis’ own health care hero “listened to my questions, and patiently reviewed all the options over and over until I completely understood the procedure. He never let time hamper my ability to ask questions. After my surgery, he asked me how I was and reassured me that I would be ok. He recognized in this interaction that I needed something more than medicine and cutting, that I needed human connection and reassurance.”

Dennis’ health care villain saw him as a problem to be solved. “He wanted to tick off a box that indicated that he took out my cancer. He didn’t spend time addressing all my concerns and questions about the proposed treatment. So he cared more about my cancer than he cared about me. He just wanted to run me through the system.”

Dennis explains that all health care providers can be heroes by being patient-centric. “Patient-centric care should not be a new-fangled, wild and radical idea. It should be the way things are. For too long patients have been guests in a system that is intimately connected with them but in which they have no power or influence. Health care doesn’t belong to the employees of health care. Health care belongs to patients.”



102-175 Carlton Street
Winnipeg, MB R3C 3H9



mips.ca
safetoask.ca



204-927-6477
1-866-927-6477



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Taking Patient Advocacy to the Next Level

Many of our “Make It Personal” column contributors have emphasized the importance of having a patient advocate. Dennis takes this idea one step further. He stresses the importance of having an ‘independent observer’ advocate. This is someone who can engage in a way that isn’t at a purely emotional level. While families might be able to play this role, it is important to acknowledge that this can be difficult for the people closest to you. This might mean including another person on your advocacy team. Maybe you have a relative that is a health care provider, or a friend that always tends to stay calm under pressure. Ask this person to quietly observe the health care interaction and make suggestions that will help everyone in the conversation. Dennis says, “As a patient, sometimes you might know what to ask, sometimes you might not, and sometimes questions need to be answered in a way that makes it easier for you to understand. These are things that your observer advocate can help with. They don’t need to be an expert. They need to be able to cut through the emotional stuff and be observant enough to help navigate the conversation.”

Dennis points out that finding an observer advocate can be difficult for people who do not have the privilege of education and an extensive support system. In this situation, Dennis believes that it is the health care system’s responsibility to provide this type of advocate, so that these individuals receive the quality of care they require and deserve.

I am you without a white coat; I am human

Dennis wants all health care professionals to bring humanity and quality of life back into the health care conversation, so that patients can make the choices that are best for them. To health care providers, Dennis says, “You know what, if I’m better off in palliative care because I’m going to have 6 months of quality of life than I am going through a radical treatment, then let’s have a conversation about palliative care. That’s about patient safety. Let’s allow each other to live well and die well. Let’s talk about these choices and consider the person living the choices. How it will influence me if I have a wife or children, and how it will influence my personal goals and wishes? Consider what questions would you be asking if you were here without your white coat.”

You can read more from Dennis at his blog <https://www.dennismaione.com/blog>

The Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation established in 2004 to promote and coordinate activities that improve patient safety and enhance quality healthcare in Manitoba.

Written by MIPS Volunteer, Cara Brown