



MANITOBA INSTITUTE  
FOR PATIENT SAFETY

## Make It Personal: Interview Series

### An Interview with Mac Horsburgh

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Mac speaks from experience when it comes to patient safety. Nearly five years ago Mac had a life-changing medical nightmare when an infection in his finger turned septic and nearly killed him. Mac was told that his infection spread to his blood stream, created an aneurysm that ruptured, and resulted in septic shock. Mac survived a week in a coma, three weeks in the ICU and more than a month in the hospital.



Retirement and surviving a life-threatening infection have not slowed Mac down. Mac volunteers his time and energy as a Patient Partner with Sepsis and COVID-19 Clinical Research Trials and an Intensive Care Unit Outcomes Improvement Committee. He is also a Patient Advisor and Advocate for the Canadian Sepsis Research Network. Mac has been an invited speaker at several healthcare conferences and has had articles published in the Winnipeg Free Press and the Globe and Mail.

#### A Patient's Role in Patient Safety

Mac believes that we all need to take responsibility for looking after ourselves. "Patient safety means that we need to acknowledge that our medical system is a human and imperfect one. As patients we need to recognize that we have a role to play in ensuring that we are treated in a safe and respectful manner." Mac advocates that a partnership between the physician and the patient, as well as good communication, are the "keys" to patient safety. He encourages us to engage with our physicians, to ask questions, and to not be passive about our healthcare.

Mac learned the hard way about the importance of good communication between a patient and their physician. When Mac was prescribed an antibiotic for his infection, he neither asked nor was given information about how long to wait and what to do if the medication was not working. As a result, he waited too long before returning for another medical assessment of his infection, a decision that almost cost him his life.

#### Mac's Top-Ten Tips on Patient Safety

Mac believes that as patients, there are a lot of things that we can do to improve our own patient safety when we seek healthcare and has created a list of ten key tips.

#### **1. Decide before you see a physician how you want to be treated and insist on that level of care.**

Your assumptions about patient care can be misleading, especially when you don't know the doctor you are dealing with, for example, at a Walk-in Clinic, or an Emergency Department.



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2. **The best patient care is provided when there is a patient/physician partnership characterized by good communication and mutual respect.**
3. **Ask questions which facilitate “informed consent” and ask for relevant discharge instructions.**
4. **Be an informed patient. Learn about your illness. Use credible sources.**
5. **Be an advocate for your well-being and or have an advocate there to assist you.** Being an advocate involves assessing and determining how you must deal with medical staff to get what you want.
6. **Ask about side effects and drug interactions of any medications you are on.** Know why each of your medications has been prescribed.
7. **Ask about recovery time, recovery issues, resources etc. for your health issue.**
8. **A patient illness is a family illness. Ask about the impact of the illness on the family.**
9. **Take charge of your illness versus letting it control you.**
10. **Find some meaning in what happened to you that will help you move forward.**

#### The Next “To-Do” in Patient Safety

When asked what he thinks the next area of patient safety that healthcare professionals and healthcare organizations should focus on next, Mac adamantly responded that, “The new frontier for medicine and patient safety should be recovery. The emphasis on patient safety shouldn’t stop when the patient leaves the medical office or the hospital. When the patients are sent out the door without the knowledge and resources needed to look after themselves and make the right decisions, patient safety is not being operationalized.” He suggests that patients ask for written discharge instructions when being discharged from a stay in a hospital or from an Emergency Department visit, and to ask the healthcare team what your recovery process may look like.

#### Getting the Patient Safety message out to All

Mac has some thoughts on spreading patient safety messages. Some of these ideas include having students who are training to be healthcare professionals, as well as those employed in healthcare, watch videos on Respect and Safety in Patient Care. In addition, videos could be posted on social media about communication and respect between patients and their healthcare providers. Mac emphasized that, “Patient safety speaks to the issue of trust and the creation of safe and respectful environments for all concerned. It is an important subject which warrants our attention.”

Mac, on behalf of all Manitobans, thank you for all that you are doing to promote respect and safety in patient care, through clear communication between patients and their healthcare providers.

*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.*

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