A healthy communication
A landmark case underlines the desperate need for patients and doctors to talk in t

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T IS good to see the National
Consumer Commission pre-
scribe for the medical com-
munity what the good doctors
themselves would probably never have ordered: culpability for "defi-ciency in service". The apex con-sumer pane has ruled that if a doc-tor does not inform patients about the side-effects of medicines and the necessary precautions to be taken, the doctor will be held re-sponsible. The court was deciding on the death of a 45-year-old man in 1993, who died after apparently fol-lowing the wrong medication pre-scribed for diabetes by his doctor.

erlines the desperate need for patients and doctors to
Despite knowing that the patient medicines they are prescribed. A was an alcoholic whose urine tests
would lead to incorrect results, the
doctor, according to the commis-
sion, jumped to the conclusion that
he was diabetic. Worse, the physi-
cian then advised the patient a very sensitive drug with-
out bothering to give
the mandatory pre-
cautions.
This is a landmark case in India
where the healthcare system is, to put it mildly, hardly in the pink of
health. ln a sense, the patients have only themselves to blame for sel-dom asking their doctors about the

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vast number of Indians still see the doctor as a near-divinity who need not be questioned. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' treatment for any con-dition, and patients should work with those prescribing their med-ication. Only then can
they determine which
treatments will work
best with their lifestyle.
But unfortunately,it is not un-
common for patients — especially the poor — who feel unable to dis-cuss their concerns with their gen-eral physician, to stop taking med-ication without even informing

line
talk in this country
him. If there is anything worse, it is the way most GPs fail to recog-nise the importance of patient in-volvement in treatment plans Suc-cessful doctor-patient relationships depend on trust. To establish that trust doctors must respect patients' right to decide whether or not to undergo a medical intervention even where a refusal may result in harm to themselves. Patients must be given sufficient information — in a way that they can understand — to enable them to exercise their right to make informed decisions about their care. And for that to happen, they must talk.

<title>A healthy communication line</title>
<keywords>NGR1 LR1 Right to Health</keywords>
<publication>The Hindustan Times</publication>
<pubDate>14/06/2008</pubDate>
<description>The National Consumer Commission has ruled that if a doc-
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<classif>D02c</classif>
<entrydt>23/06/2008</entrydt>
<sd>RP</sd>