Surgeon-patient communication in oncology.

Abstract: Little is known about the quality of post-operative communications following oncological surgery and the satisfaction of patients with the communication process. Thirty-eight patients who underwent surgery for primary gastrointestinal cancer were interviewed before being discharged from the hospital. The patients' recall of information concerning the surgery, histological diagnosis, post-operative therapy and treatment goal was assessed. The congruence between the information provided by the surgeons and that retained by the patients was evaluated. The information provided by the surgeons about the diagnosis, histology and post-operative therapy plan was correctly recalled by over 92%, 81% and 97% of the patients respectively. Only 70% of the patients correctly recalled information about the goal of the treatment. Moreover, patients receiving only palliative treatment showed less recall of information about the treatment goal than patients receiving curative treatment (33% versus 89%). The surgeons reported that only 35% of the patients left the hospital completely informed. Overall, the patients were highly satisfied with their communication with their surgeon, and the patients' recall of information was generally good. The information given by the surgeons was often incomplete, however. Our explorative analysis showed that the quality of communication was often worse for patients with a palliative treatment goal than for patients with a curative treatment goal.