"She doesn't know that she has a tumor": A Conversation Analysis of Three-Party Medical Consultations in Saudi Arabia

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One of the cultural traditions in Saudi Arabia is that a female patient has to be accompanied by a third party to the medical clinics, thus giving rise to three-party consultations. This situation raises a number of issues, including: (1) what are the female patient's activities when talking to her male doctor in front of her chaperone? (2) How does the chaperone do the talk? (3) What interactional activities does the chaperone play in the medical consultation? In other words, does the chaperone align with the patient? Does the chaperone take over the patient's role, or do the patient and the chaperone act separately? And, does the chaperone sit as a bystander, observer, or eavesdropper?

This project addresses these issues by examining doctor-patient-chaperone interaction during the delivery of bad diagnostic news (Maynard, 1992, 1997; Heath, 1992; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008). Data for this paper are drawn from actual medical consultations recorded in three hospitals (two private and one governmental) in Saudi Arabia (collected from 17 November 2011 to 13 February 2012). A randomly selected case study has been taken from a surgical oncology clinic, where the female patient has not been informed about her disease in spite of being diagnosed with stage four cervical cancer by her female oncologist. Close analysis of the data within a conversation analysis framework reveals various activities being carried out by the female chaperone during the complex delivery of the bad diagnostic news.

References

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