

# The power of doctors makes elderly patients passive

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Elderly patients are often critical towards the meeting with the doctor. Hierarchical structures, time pressure and traditions in the health care sector make these patients and their relatives passive when facing the doctor and his or her position of power. This is shown in a thesis from the Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

The study is based on interviews with 20 elderly patients and their relatives in Gothenburg, Sweden, and about an equal number of doctors.

'We cannot disregard that the ability of doctors to communicate with elderly patients and their relatives could be improved, and that this shortcoming may explain why this group of patients feel insecure in the meeting with the doctor. They don't feel at home in the [health care](#) system and sometimes have problems understanding the doctor,' says Sandra Pennbrant, [nurse](#) and the author of the thesis.

A good relation between the doctor and the patient leads to reduced apprehension and increased faith in the health care system. This kind of relation requires among other things that the doctor and the patient discuss the situation and that the doctor listens to what the patient has to say before deciding on a treatment plan.

'Elderly patients and their relatives tend to have a critical view of the meeting with the doctor. Doctors and patients have the same understanding of how good relations can be created, but it seems that doctors have a hard time accomplishing it in real life,' says Pennbrant.

The interviewed [doctors](#) feel it is difficult to create good relations in the meeting with elderly patients and that this is mainly because the patient often stays at the hospital for only a short time.

Pennbrant concludes that the health care sector needs to become a learning organisation where the medical personnel are trained to prevent misunderstandings in their meeting with elderly patients and their relatives.

'Doctors need to learn to acknowledge the questions [elderly patients](#) may have and consider their medical conditions and personalities in communication and when building relations. Relatives should also participate in this meeting, so that they feel their work is supported and appreciated,' says Pennbrant.

Source: University of Gothenburg ([news](#) : [web](#))

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