

I have made the journey from being a dependent, helpless, abused "patient" to being a relatively healthy, empowered, and satisfied consumer. I can't, however, take all the credit for this healing transformation.

During the first twenty years of my treatment, doctors were often condescending and paternalistic. Once, for example, when I was engaging in minor self-mutilation behavior (scratching my stomach with a broken light bulb), I was forcibly restrained for two consecutive days. I constantly felt dehumanized, afraid, and ashamed. Somewhere in an endless, painful existence, I lost my SELF.

Then ten years ago I met my current psychiatrist and began a lifesaving collaboration, a give and take between peers. He has helped me acquire skills which allow me to be a more assertive and informed partner in my relationships with medical professionals. He looks to me for information about new drugs, the latest intervention techniques, and current consumer concerns. He accepts me just as I am and is always there for me. Since I began interacting with doctors in this way I feel I have reclaimed my SELF. I feel real. I feel in control.

There are important recovery benefits to a relationship with your doctor that is based upon acceptance, mutual trust, respect and recognition of the dignity of the individual. Reflect on the degree of rapport you have with your doctor. Do you feel empowered?