

# LAMA - Left Against Medical Advice

- By Mr. Aaditya Koshe (Director, Anantavi Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.)

You all may have faced a situation when a patient is very old and refuses treatment or a patient who is not responding to treatment even with your best efforts or a patient who simply refuses to be treated for no apparent reason. All these situations that I described are ideal for "LAMA" - a short form of "Left Against Medical Advice". Lama is defined as "A patient who insists on leaving against the express advice of the treating doctor. " LAMA is a universal problem in both rural and urban hospitals.

The problem of LAMA is like a two-edged sword, on one side the patient has a right to refuse treatment and, in some cases, it is rightful to do so, while on the other side patients who have taken LAMA are at a risk of adverse or poor health outcome because of incomplete treatment, which increases the risk of re-hospitalization or morbidity and mortality.

It is not enough to believe that taking a LAMA consent might protect the hospital from future litigation. On the other hand, a half-treated patient is like a wounded tiger, he has a fiercer chance of attacking you back with a litigation.

Furthermore, not giving discharge instructions and follow-up advice or medication could constitute as coercion, negligence or unwillingness to consider alternative options for the patient.

Looking at the problems that may arise out of a LAMA here are a few tips that will reduce those problems.

## **1. Disclose all the details:**

Explain to the relatives and the patient all the procedures and the treatment followed. You should clear all the technical doubts that the patient has and give them ample time to take decision. Never rush to start the procedures of LAMA. Always have a witness when you are explaining to the relative\patient their problem. Write down the points explained and get the signature of the patient\relative.

## **2. Suggest options:**

When you explain the procedures to the patient\relative always suggest different options for treatment. Again, note down these options on the IPD paper.

## **3. Consent:**

A consent of LAMA is the most important document. It should be stored in Lock and key once filled by the patient in his own handwriting and the language that is understood by

the patient. A LAMA consent should have the followings points covered.

- *A declaration that the hospital should not be held responsible for any further consequences.*
- *A declaration that the hospital gave the best possible treatment.*
- *A declaration that the hospital gave all possible options of treatment.*
- *A declaration that the hospital gave full cooperation and patient received full satisfaction.*

#### **4. Documentation:**

Before giving any discharge to the patient or before handing over any document to the patient check it twice for completeness of documentation. Get it cross checked from a subordinate or a colleague.

Get the patient's/relative's sign while handing over the documents. In the discharge card note explicitly the reason for a LAMA.

#### **5. Extend full co-operation:**

Getting a LAMA is the patient's right, so be supportive of the decision and also assist the patient in a smooth discharge. Do not resist the patient in any way. Moreover, never advise a patient that their insurance will not be covered if they take a LAMA.