

Work Ethic and Incentive in Today's Cuba

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Clínica estomatológica en Candelaria, provincia de Artemisa. (foto 14ymedio)

HAVANA TIMES – My work colleague came in today somewhat nervous, jittery and with half her face swollen.

She'd been complaining about her wisdom tooth causing her a lot of pain for days, and she couldn't bear it any longer, so she decided to go to the dentist today to get it taken out.

She clearly had a very rough time.

"It was the most horrible thing I've ever had to go through, not even my daughter's birth was that hard," she tells me with some difficulty, hardly able to speak.

"The dentist was working on the root canal from 8 AM until 11 AM, about to break my jawbone. She gave me three injections of anaesthesia during that time, and when I thought she had finally finished, I moved her hands and told her that I couldn't take it anymore, that if she didn't know how to take it out, it was better for a maxillofacial surgeon to take a look," she said.

"It was iatrogenesis, which is damage caused by a medical action, in this case the incorrect procedure when trying to extract your wisdom tooth," I told her.

“She should have given you an X-ray first to see what the situation was with the root of the wisdom tooth. Plus, these kinds of extractions are almost always done by maxillofacial surgeons. Legally speaking, this should be taken to trial.”

“I know, but I don’t want to make things hard because she’s a friend of mine,” she replies.

Soon after our conversation, a doubt popped into my head. “Did you take a gift for the dentist?”

“Yes, because otherwise it would have taken me weeks to sort this out. Taking something was the only way to be seen immediately,” she tells me.

I didn’t want to know what the gift was, but I think this is where the answer to the situation lies.

The dentist’s interest in keeping what my colleague took her meant that she didn’t have an objective and clear view of the problem. The dentist decided to take on the risk of extracting the wisdom tooth and threw due process out of the window.

This isn’t general practice, but the tough economic situation in the country means that some people taint work ethic, and don’t comply with protocol. They not only risk losing their licenses, they also put many people’s lives at risk. Although the patient’s haste to treat the pain also clouds their judgement.

We need to be aware of the possible consequences when we give gifts to be seen. I don’t think it’s a bad thing to give doctors an incentive, but the balance between work ethic and incentive needs to be there until proper treatment is completed.