

I read with much interest your recent column in *Practical Dermatology* (Editor's Message, April 2008, p. 8). Much of what you say is interesting: patient satisfaction studies, tapping into patient experiences, as you say to experience each aspect of the office visit, and to experience the patient's point of view, etc.

What I would suggest and add to you as a young man with a great business job with a young family is this: You deal with well people and you deal with people who make business decisions and you deal with situations where you want to make a profit in your business.

My suggestion to you is that, without your child, spend a Monday morning at the receptionist's desk at a pediatric clinic. Ask to help them answer the phone. It would be interesting to watch your responses. Remember this: you have business appointments with one person or with a group of people with one or perhaps two business problems. It is not an emergency situation. I suspect however that if you were to receive a phone call in the middle of your business meeting, that you would not stop what you are doing and take each and every call. You would have your secretary take the number and call when you have the time. Am I right?

You will find that the poor receptionist is overwhelmed with young mothers who want their child seen that day, or that morning, or maybe right now. The average good doctor's office will receive perhaps 100 calls Monday morning from parents, each of whom feels that their problem is paramount and never mind that someone has had a sitting appointment for weeks. In some cases this is correct; there are emergencies. Doctors work with sick people, not with well business people. Doctors work with children who can get deathly ill in hours and that, my good friend, is what puts them behind at times and this is why you may wait.

I suspect that if your pediatrician is good, you will wait. And, consider yourself lucky if you get in within an hour. I did back then and still do.

Only yesterday I saw an internist, and it took an hour wait. The guy was going as hard as he could. These are not well patients, these are sick people in his office. Old people have myriad problems, and they get sick fast, just as the young do.

A man I went to med school with had a brother who was a pediatrician in a college town. He told me that one weekend on call his brother had 180 phone calls. Calculate that figure out over an hour's time. Each of these people probably wanted the same type of quick service that you would suggest is possible, but generally it is not so. So, the doctor who has worked all weekend comes in Monday morning and has an office full of sick children and there is a guy out front who is upset about waiting an hour.

I no longer see children in my office because of young parents who want immediate action. However, I deal with the old and infirm, many of whom enter in with eight to 10 problems. I do my best, but it puts me behind at times. I hope my doctor will have the same patience with me that I have with my patients and that I ask the patients in the waiting room to have. But, you know, most physicians do their best and they do look from the patient's point of view. I always apologize for any delays but now I just explain how I work with the poor and indigent and you know, if people don't like it, I suggest maybe another physician could work better with them.

As you get older you may also have more patience. You may realize that those poor people of whom you are critical are doing their best and they are working as hard as they can. You and your family may have to wait a while now. If a national health insurance plan comes into being you will be waiting much longer.

When I go to for a haircut, I wait 15-30 minutes and have only women's magazines to read. I wait when I go to my accountant, and I wait for my business people to call me back. I wait in line at WalMart. My minister is very busy, I wait for his calls. So far, no one has fast-laned me in any situation.

When I call in for my doctor, I don't expect him/her to drop everything and call me fast. If I have an emergency I should go to the ER. If not, then I wait in line for the doctor to call me back after he has been on his feet for 10-12 hours, and I appreciate his/her time.

As far as assuming a "more welcoming and caring mien," most of the physicians and staff I deal with have that. Most try their hardest. Life is a two-sided existence. We live in an imperfect world. We in the medical field can always do better. Patients at the same time should try to be a little more understanding of today's critical medical environment. ■

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