

Prejudice or Coincidence?

Category: Traumatized

written by Karen E. Lasser | November 7, 2023

I have been a primary care doctor for twenty-eight years. In the past week, two patients have questioned my medical judgement and threatened me. I have feared going to the parking garage alone after clinic and have worried that I will be sued. Why, after all these years of a peaceful practice, have I experienced hate from my patients?

A dual Israeli-US citizen, I have been wearing a star of David around my neck, especially since the terrorist attacks of October 7, 2023. An antisemitic symbol was discovered in a restroom in my hospital. Was I now experiencing antisemitism from my patients? Or was this all a coincidence? Each of my patients had experienced profound recent losses: one, her daughter in a motor vehicle accident, the other, his foot from an infection. Had I been a target of their displaced anger, and was their behavior unrelated to world events?

My patient who lost her daughter had been asking for Vicodin, to “help get her through the winter.” CDC guidelines, her score on the opioid risk tool, neurology pain and addiction medicine specialists, in addition to her psychiatrist, all argued against a need for opioids. I wondered if the car accident that had occurred late at night had involved substances. Her daughter had previously used heroin.

My patient who had lost his foot had reasons to distrust me and the health care system. Tobacco companies had marketed flavored cigarettes in his neighborhood when he was a child. He was irritated that the specialists were pressuring him to enroll in medical studies and draw many tubes of blood. He thought I had sent incorrect medication doses to his pharmacy.

Deeply shaken by these events, I sought refuge in nature, taking a walk on the beach with my husband and poodle. I intentionally left my phone at home; searching for sources of unbiased news and scrolling through photos of human carnage had exhausted me. A warm November day, sand bars in the distance, the dogs of Quinneset barking, my dog delighted to find a stray tennis ball, a crushed lobster trap, and mountains of dried kelp served as momentary distractions.

We walked back to our car, parked near a small harbor. Two clammers in chest waders smiled at us and made small talk. They made no notice of my husband's kipa. They gave us some oysters, reminding me that there is goodness in a world that, of late, has been overflowing with hate.

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