

Dismissing a Patient

Category: Tough Choices

written by Andrea Eisenberg | September 20, 2017

I could smell the greasy, fast food before I even reached for the door. As I entered the exam room, I caught her rummaging through her McDonald's bag, then she quickly looked up with a big grin on her face. Without even a pause, she shoved a french fry in her mouth and exclaimed "Hi, Dr. Eisenberg!" Her T-shirt was taut over her pregnant belly, slightly riding up to reveal her chocolaty, smooth skin.

Sigh, I had reminded her before to not bring fast food into the office.

A couple weeks later, I found her balancing a large, glazed danish precariously on a paper plate as I walked in. I noticed a bite had already been taken, and when I turned to her, the remnants of the glaze shimmered on her lips. "Hi, Dr. Eisenberg. Want some?"

This time, I clarified that I preferred she didn't bring any food into the office. After she left, I noticed the empty plate on the window sill.

As her pregnancy progressed, her boundaries became nonexistent. My office became her home despite my repeated attempts at reminding her that it was a doctor's office. Her appointment times were meaningless to her, and she would show up whenever. Sometimes, she wouldn't show up at all. I contemplated terminating our doctor-patient relationship, but how could I abandon her mid-pregnancy?

After spending nearly twenty-four hours with her in labor, it was obvious she needed a c-section for her large baby. Exhausted, as I left the operating room, she turned and asked: "Dr. Eisenberg, can you buy me a pizza? I'm hungry."

Postpartum, she was even worse – if she showed up at all, she would literally move into the exam room and set up home. Each time I entered her exam room, she would tell me she needed more time, busying herself nursing, changing the baby's diaper, eating her food and on and on, making me late for my other patients.

Although I felt, as a physician, I had the responsibility to care for her, the reality was, she was abusing me and my time. I finally made the tough choice and dismissed her as a patient.

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