

# December More Voices: Connections

Category: Connections

written by Paul Gross | December 1, 2022

Dear *Pulse* readers,

When I was a second-year medical student, a physician in our lecture hall warned us what would happen if we made a particular error:

“Your patient’s family will sue you,” he said sharply, as if reprimanding us for a mistake we’d already made.

“And you will deserve to be sued.”

Thirty-eight years later I still remember the emotion in his voice—the combination of anger and accusation.

This was one of countless lessons I was taught in medical school. Here is a lesson I was *never* taught:

*Over your career you will have incredible opportunities to make connections with your patients. Right now you see yourself as a hero galloping in to rescue people from misfortune—and there’s a bit of that in being a doctor. But that’s only half the story.*

*You see, your patients are going to nourish you just as much as you nourish them—if you let them. Over time you may come to love, yes love, many of them as much as they love you*

*And you may find that this is the very best part of being a doctor.*

This lesson came to me with a jolt when I left my previous job, where I’d worked for fourteen years. When it came time to say goodbye to my patients, a realization hit me hard.

I’d spent much of those fourteen years in exam rooms pawing through charts, and worrying: *When was Mrs. Cruz’s last mammogram? Is Mr. Delgado due for a colonoscopy? What am I forgetting?*

At the same moment, I was fretting, *How many patients are in the waiting room? How far behind schedule am I?*

Meanwhile, something glorious had been taking place: Our roots, my patients’ and mine, had been twining around one other, and we’d formed relationships that had come to mean a *lot* to me.

Until then, in my tunnel vision, I’d missed this.

It was as if, over the years in that exam room, we’d unknowingly been painting a canvas, and it wasn’t until turning to leave that I noticed, nearly too late, that together we’d created a work of art.

Nowadays I tell students that it's important to practice medicine correctly, but the warm glow of doing that soon dissipates. I don't go home patting myself on the back for prescribing the right blood-pressure pill.

Rather, what affirms me is the connection I feel with the person who takes the pill—the connection that manifests in a smile, a story or a conversation that begins, “How long have I been seeing you, doctor...?”

I don't have a randomized controlled study to prove the power of this connection, but I believe it's as vital to my patients' health as any tablet I prescribe—probably more so.

It's certainly important to *my* health. My patients give me a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose in life. A feeling of being loved.

There *are* studies showing that connections with people and pets contribute to longevity. In that sense, we are all doctoring one another.

What's your experience of [Connections](#), this month's More Voices theme? Use the [More Voices Submission Form](#) to send us an account of your lived experience.

For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme, [Emergencies](#).

Remember, your health-related story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With warm regards,

Paul Gross  
Editor