

Dare to Care

Category: Bedside Manner

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | September 1, 2023

As an educator, my students reacted not to the universities I attended, the degrees I earned, or my experience in the profession, but to my enthusiasm, creativity, compassion and respect. Assuming that I understood the material, they cared more about how I treated them as individuals.

I perceive my physicians the way my students viewed me. I know that these women and men are graduates of a medical school; they do not have to prove that to me. What they do need to demonstrate, however, is a bedside manner that makes me comfortable communicating with them. I base my approach to all doctors on the way my beloved father, an optometrist, treated his patients. He listened to their visual concerns; he lent them money if they needed funds for the streetcar; he delivered glasses to their homes at night to prevent them from having to make a trip downtown.

My current primary care physician is a strong listener. He has known me for years; he is familiar with my strengths and weaknesses as an individual and as a patient. My dermatologist, concerned about my new and chronic burning lip syndrome, has gone out of her way to research treatments for me; she has even given me her private phone number in case I have a negative reaction to a medication or an issue that cannot wait until the next business day. In contrast, another specialist treats me as part of a human assembly line. He rushes into the examination room, does a cursory check-up following the more intensive one done by his assistant, and then leaves. I trust his medical knowledge, but his behavior and tone often leave me feeling dismissed. I am currently looking for another doctor to replace this one.

Interacting with people in a congenial, respectful way matters a great deal to me. As a child and teenager, my peers often dismissed me—too tall, too smart, too shy, too clumsy on the dance floor. As a divorced woman, men on the prowl overlooked me for the more petite, bubbly women in search of a second husband. I understand what it feels like to be made invisible and inconsequential. Thus, I try to treat others in a way that gives them value, and I respectfully request that others treat me in the same way.

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