

Not Such a Tough Call

Category: Tough Calls

written by Sara Ann Conkling | October 5, 2023

Earlier this year, my beloved family practice doctor retired. Over many years, I had had ample opportunity to appreciate his diagnostic skill, his professionalism and his kindness. Moreover, I felt I could always trust that he would respect my wishes. I had a real partner in my health care.

He gave me almost a year's notice of his retirement. Maybe he knew that it would be difficult for me to replace him. But I had to try. He suggested a physician who had recently been hired in his medical system. I met Dr. Replacement and recounted my current issues, including debilitating long COVID and a specialist referral I had found particularly challenging. Dr. Replacement referred me to a long COVID clinic that didn't accept my insurance and never followed up on the other referral I needed.

My second option was a local doctor with an excellent reputation, who, alas, was not taking new patients. But one of his partners was taking new patients, and since the partner was also on my list, I made the appointment to see the partner. Upon arrival, Dr. Partner's staff greeted me with the news that they had misplaced the long medical history I had sent a week prior to my appointment. Somehow I anticipated that this could happen, so I had another copy in my handbag. Many minutes later, Dr. Partner greeted me by saying, "There's no way I can provide what you need." At least he was honest.

The next doctor I met was quite a bit down my list. He was older than me, which meant we both were officially elderly. He also practiced alone, which came with a real concern for who covers his practice when he's not there. Still, his office was nearby and his reviews were good. His patients loved him.

The paperwork his office required before my first visit was more than I had ever encountered. His office staff had been with him for thirty years. By the time I arrived for my first appointment, my chart was already pretty thick.

It didn't take Dr. Solo long to declare, "I hate modern medicine."
(Expletives deleted.) He was as colorful as his language. He'd read my chart. He asked good questions, confessing that "you're my most complicated patient – and not this week. In the past forty years."

It wasn't a tough call. I'm still seeing Dr. Solo.

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