

A Doctor's Visit

Category: Stories

written by Arya F. Jenkins | September 14, 2021



My new doctor enters the examining room where I have been waiting for him, seated on a rumpled paper sheet at the edge of a brown leather lounge chair. Behind the doctor's blue mask, he is wearing a furrowed brow of worry.

This is my first visit to a doctor in more than ten years, but I am not apprehensive. I am fortunately healthy, and have been for years, but post the pandemic, if that's indeed where we are, I figure it's time to inquire about the status of my right wrist, which hurts and puffs up from time to time after it's exercised. I am a writer and transcriber, and my wrist reacts adversely depending on how much work I do.

I just want confirmation that it's carpal tunnel syndrome and not something else—and, along with that, I want to connect with a GP, because I've heard it's wise to do so, to have a professional acquainted with your medical history in case of an emergency. It's what people do.

This GP is situated on the main street of a town in Ohio, a few miles away from the community where I have been living since ending my second marriage and deciding to flee the East Coast for somewhere cheap to do what I have always wanted to do, write. He was recommended by a friend who also rarely sees doctors.

My new doctor is handsome and fit, somewhere in his late fifties, with curly graying hair and wire rims. One look at his ring finger tells me his fingers are slightly swollen, although his hands and spatulate fingernails are immaculate, even before he turns to wash up in the corner sink. On this late

May day, we are both wearing jeans and Nike sneakers.

I finish a work-related text and send it off and put aside my cell phone so as not to appear rude. Then, as if to make up for my momentary lapse, I pose what I consider to be a caring question, inquiring how the doctor's year with COVID has been. Instead of getting the expected stock reply—something like, "Well, it was a struggle for us all, wasn't it, I'm glad we're past it"—my question elicits a torrent of unabashed, scorching complaints.

"Many of my patients got the virus, and it was overwhelming, mainly because there was absolutely no support from the local or federal government," he says. "The government was slow to recognize the basic needs of the hospital workers—but then it focused exclusively on them." Doctors in private practices, serving hard-hit communities like his, got no support whatsoever, and, while losing business, had to fend for themselves by paying for all COVID-related supplies like PPE.

He looks at me straight on. "It's been awful."

Standing to my right, the doctor slips down his blue paper mask to his chin to facilitate chatting. I keep my mask on the entire time.

"I got COVID early on," he explains. "Every one of my office assistants also got it."

"Are you planning to get the vaccine?" I ask.

None of them have been vaccinated or intend to get the vaccine.

"I check for antibodies all the time. I'm loaded with them," he informs me. "Having antibodies works better than a vaccine that's merely experimental. The CDC has its own agenda, trying to see everyone vaccinated. Anyway, the only people who really get COVID are those over age sixty-five who have multiple other conditions like obesity and diabetes."

I mention instances where young, supposedly healthy people caught the virus and died.

He replies, "That's because they didn't know what to do then"—a comment that bears elaboration, although he offers none. He says the CDC just wants people vaccinated in order to have the numbers, "as if that will prove something."

I ask whether he has thought of sending an email to our governor.

"Writing a letter of complaint to the governor is the last thing I want to do when I get home at night," he replies. "Anyway, things are a little better now."

He tells me he's been a doctor thirty-five years. "Got into it for the right reasons, and of course when COVID came, I realized it was my job to help people. But ask me, would I do it again? No, I would not. I definitely would not. Do you know what it's like knowing someone for years—my patients are like my family—and then having to tell someone they have cancer?"

He sighs and places his stethoscope on my chest and then on my back, while asking me to breathe in and out, then takes my right hand and turns it over, testing my wrist for agility and pain.

"You can get it X-rayed across the street if you want," he says. Sure. Insurance is paying, and the proximity is convenient.

After my exam, which takes about five out of the fifteen or so minutes the doctor has been in the room talking with me, he studies me appraisingly, perhaps mentally going over what he has just said. A part of me wonders whether he is remorseful, feels his words may have betrayed his profession in some way. But this turns out not to be the case.

"It's been very nice talking to you. Avoid seeing any doctors at all for as long as you possibly can" are his final words, and his only prescription.