



BY JARROD SHAPIRO, DPM

Bedside Manner: Are You Self-Aware?

Remember that there's a patient
at the other end of that foot.

Practice Perfect is a continuing every-issue column in which Dr. Shapiro offers his unique personal perspective on the ins and outs of running a podiatric practice.

How often do you think about your bedside manner? Are you good at making patients feel comfortable? Do they smile despite their pain? Do patients feel they can speak with you safely? Or is the patient interaction something to get through so you can figure out how to physically treat the patient and move on to the next one? Are you a technician or a clinician? Do you know who you are and how you appear to your patients? People are variably adept at self-understanding, and all of us could use more personal reflection.



A Little Self-Reflection

In fact, this concept of self-reflection has established itself at some of the more progressive medical schools. The Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine incorporates reflection in its formal curriculum.¹ This reflection draws on the idea of narrative medicine in which those in training document their experiences in some way (often written) and while doing so, reflect in a focused manner on their own responses to those experiences.

For example, the late author

and surgeon Dr. Sherwin Nuland, an amazing medical writer, wrote a book called *The Soul of Medicine: Tales from the Bedside*. Dr. Nuland documented various experiences he had over 30 years of his surgical career and reflected on what those experiences and the people he met meant to him. It was a glimpse into the mind of a very special person.

Do you know who you are and how you appear to your patients?

But you don't have to be a famous author to reflect on your own experiences and what they mean to you.

For some of us, self-reflection comes easy—you may be highly self-aware, understanding your deeper motivations for the things you do. Others of us are less aware, moving through life without a full realization

Continued on page 40

Bedside (from page 39)

of what makes us tick. Likely, most of us are somewhere in the middle. We are who we are, and it isn't a value judgment about which we may be. However, for those of you who rarely self-reflect, there may come a moment when something happens that forces you to truly consider who you are. When that moment comes, absorb it and let it do whatever it will to you. It's amazing how much you'll learn about yourself.

Here's a real-life example. It used to be that when a patient cried (it's not uncommon in a field in which patients may lose body parts), I wouldn't always take comforting action. This deficiency was unrealized until during one such episode in which a patient was upset and crying, and one of the trainees did the simple act of handing her a tissue. Granted this sounds like a small gesture, but in that moment, it was apparent how powerful such simple acts can be. The tissue wasn't to wipe away tears and allow the encounter to end. The tissue was a human act that reached out to that patient to say, "I understand you're in pain and empathize with you. You're scared and unhappy,

but I know you want to maintain your dignity, and I'm here to help if you need it." Looking back later, it became apparent how special that small act was, and acting on that realization has made me a better doctor and person.

and listen to a patient without interruption, an honest warm smile—these are the essence of a good bedside manner.

We're all guilty of losing our humanity at certain times, but it's the power of self-reflection that allows us

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The Essence of Good Bedside Manner

Whenever you see a patient who's upset with his or her prior doctor and found you as an alternative, it's invariably because the physician is in too much of a rush or comes across cold or not educating the patient about his/her problem. These are the important acts we as providers and fellow humans must do with our patients. These unspoken acts—the tissue, a warm touch on the arm, an extra moment to stay

to rediscover and better understand that humanity. And it all translates to better bedside manner. PM

Reference

1 Wasson K, et al. Physician, Know-Thyself: The Role of Reflection in Bioethics and Professionalism Education. Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics, Spring 2015; 5(1): 77-86.


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40

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