I Don’t Get No Respect

By Melissa Young, MD [2]

What ever happened to manners? To courtesy? Why do patients feel that our time is unimportant? That we should just sit there and take it when they yell? That they can call you at 11 p.m. to ask for a prescription? That they can not pay their share of their bill?

As I sat here at 5 p.m. waiting for my 4:30 patient to arrive, I couldn’t help but think, al a Rodney Dangerfield: “I don’t get no respect.”

I pride myself on running on time. I am quite obsessive about it. I get very agitated if I am running even five minutes late. It is one of the things my former partner once taught me. My patients love it. They don’t even have time to sit down in the waiting room. It is probably more appropriately named the reception area, since there is almost no waiting going on out there. My patients know that they can come in, be placed in a room, and be seen in a timely manner. They can plan their day around their visit because they know they will on their way at a certain time.

Of course, to make this run smoothly, patients must arrive on time. Yes, of course, I understand, weather, traffic, flat tires, etc., etc. happen. So while we do have a policy that states that patient may have to be rescheduled if they are more than 10 minutes late, we often find ways to accommodate them.

So today, when Mr. 4:30 had his wife call at 4:30 (!) to say they would be about 10 minutes late, we said OK. At 4:45, I had my secretary call them and ask them how much longer they would be. Five minutes, 10 tops. Sigh. OK.

At 5 p.m. (closing time), I called. They were at the corner. I told them that it would have to be a quick visit because they were already 30 minutes late and we are supposed to close. So when he saunters in, and wants to tell me all his woes, I have to cut him off and tell him that due to time constraints he’s just going to have to answer my questions.

Good Lord, of course he had to be incapable of answering yes or no questions without a two paragraph story! And his major concern? That if he ran a marathon, that he would have a heart attack. Is he planning on running a marathon? No. Does he have any chest pain shortness of breath or other symptoms? No. No problems walking up stairs? No. I was ready to have a heart attack.

Now, bear with me. I was already agitated. I had a woman screaming at me over the phone that she is tired and can’t lose weight, but doesn’t want to take her thyroid medicine because it makes her tongue feel “like a sponge.” No, it wasn’t swollen, just spongy. Sigh. I tried to listen as respectfully as I could, but at one point I just had to tell her to stop yelling at me.

What ever happened to manners? To courtesy? Why do patients feel that our time is unimportant? That we should just sit there and take it when they yell? That they can call you at 11 p.m. to ask for a prescription? That they can not pay their share of their bill? It has been a long exasperating week.

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