

LISTEN TO THE NURSES

The face of American Medicine is changing. Our population is aging, demographics are changing and money for health care is being tightened. Obamacare (officially the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act) seeks to rein in outrageous costs through monitoring of best care practices, pay per performance and the increased utilization of collaborative providers—nurses, midwives and physician assistants. Physicians tend to displays of confidence and arrogance. Who would go to a non confident surgeon? As far as arrogance, to become a board certified physician one must go to a four year college, have a grade point average of 3.84 out of 4.0 to be accepted to medical school, complete four years of residency training and take a three step licensing exam and a board certification exam so a bit of arrogance and/or pride in “having made it “ is justified if it doesn't interfere with patient care. Upon being accepted to medical school, that very evening I met the love of my life, an Oswego Hospital Intensive Care nurse, Sarah. After graduation from medical school, she still knew more practical medicine than I did and she gave me the admonishment: “ALWAYS LISTEN TO THE NURSES”. Newly minted physicians in residency programs generally think that they are God's gift to medicine although book smart does not equate with clinically smart. Following Sarah's advice as I fought my way through four sleep deprived years of residency I always listened to the nurses' advice on patient care, medications, procedures etc. As I became more proficient I needed less advice but always heeded a nurse's warning about a very sick patient and even which doctors to trust and in whom to seek advice. Clearly, a very small number of a doctor's patients are hospitalized and the average time spent with a patient on rounds is between five and ten minutes. The nurses are there 24/7 and listen to every nuanced complaint that a patient might not disclose to their doctor. While the era of Florence Nightingale has passed and the nurses no longer have to chop wood or hand wash surgical gloves, manual labor has been replaced with overwhelming and redundant paperwork. In spite of this, their kind words, warm hearts, and gentle hands make or break the physician who would not be able to function if not for the nursing staff. Since I have trained physicians, nurses and physician assistants I can unequivocally say that patients would do well to tell them even their most minor complaint. To my fellow physicians, stay out of trouble by listening to what the nurses tell you—a patient's life might well depend upon it. I will close with an amusing anecdote from my residency years. There happened to be a magazine called “Residency Wives”. A resident's wife wrote an article: “How do you ask God to throw out the garbage?” The gist was that this new medical school graduate—steeped in his own pomposity—when arriving home had to come down from the high horse and do the chores. So, when asked to throw out the garbage by my wife on my way to the hospital I remarked: “do you think that Dr. Debakey (famous heart surgeon) throws out the garbage?” Her reply: “you are no Dr. Debakey”. Bam. Humble pie. Nurses day is May 6. Honor them, revere them, they will save your life and the lives of your family members as well.