

September 7, 2015

TODAY'S HEALTH FOR THE EMPOWERED WOMAN

WHAT DOCTORS CAN LEARN FROM THEIR PATIENTS

In August I read an excellent article by Suneel Dhand, M.D. about what patients can teach their doctors. I felt it to be so compelling that I had to share with you readers. The major points are those of Dr. Dhand but the embellishments are mine. 1.) People are brave and have a capacity for resilience. As an obstetrician/gynecologist I have witnessed and taken care of women in moments of great adversity ranging from the diagnosis of a stillborn or a deformed fetus to cancer, heart disease, long and drawn out labor, etc. I was continuously amazed at the capacity of most patients to be optimistic and brave and determined to overcome some terrible circumstances. I always wondered how I myself would have reacted to the same or similar diagnosis. 2.) Family is important. Families come together in times of illness and especially the time surrounding the birth of a child that represents that family's hope for the future. This is the reason that obstetrical units tout family centered care. Mothers and grandmothers become the support people during labor despite the length of labor and are the consoling factor when adverse circumstances occur. Rather than be accusatory to the physician most family members are helpful, caring and kind. That is not to say that the father of the baby is not helpful but usually he is in such a state of panic and worry that mom and grandmother take over. Families all gather round when the diagnosis of cancer is made and are the best support during bad times. Hospice care was developed with this very concept in mind—so that the terminal patient could be cared for at home surrounded by loved ones. 3.) Things can change in an instant. Illness can strike suddenly. One can wake up in the morning and everything is rosy but suddenly the world can turn upside down when there is a shock diagnosis. Oh how the minor worries of the day suddenly become trivial. Not trying to be the disciple of gloom here but live for the day (*carpe diem*). Adversity can happen to anyone. 4.) What we do matters. I have always felt blessed to be in a profession in which I can do so much good for my fellow man. Not just surgery and delivering babies but consoling and talking to my patients about their very real concerns. Women especially have “issues” at different times of their lives: start of puberty, childbearing, middle age—menopause, and the concerns of aging. Doctors and nurses really can make an impact on a patient's life. I think that all people can make an impact on anyone's life but in medicine we are given that unique opportunity every day—the most satisfying part of the job. 5.) Life is short. Don't we all wish we were fifty years younger? When patients tell me this it puts my own life into perspective and to refocus on my own priorities. Remember that most often we regret not what we did but what we did not do. Health care is about personal relationships and in previous articles I have written extensively about that and, sadly, the erosion of these relationships as telemedicine, hospitalists, laborists, become more common. Patients have taught ME how wonderful these relationships are. Doctors should be empowered by these very relationships and use them to become better clinicians. In summary, I thank the patients who have inspired me.