

dear residents

The Care of the Patient

July 9, 2023

Dear Residents,

Shortly before his death from cancer in 1927, Dr. Francis Peabody published an [essay](#) entitled ‘The Care of the Patient.’ The essay (based on one of a series of talks he gave to Harvard Medical Students) closes with its oft quoted line:

One of the essential qualities of the clinician is interest in humanity, for the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient.

The three themes that he presciently posited, shaped the subsequent practice of medicine: **the patient as a person** (not a diabetic, but a person with diabetes), **hospitalization as a dehumanizing experience** (this led to developments in hospital design to promote privacy and a “healing” environment) and the importance of an understanding of the **patient’s personal perspective** (especially when there is no immediate “organic” cause for their symptoms). The latter is best explained as the difference between asking “what’s the matter with you?” and “what matters to you?” or as Dr. Peabody reminds us, of the dismissiveness of “nothing the matter with them.” He goes on to state: “...but I am fairly certain that, except for a few low-grade morons and some poor wretches who want to get in out of the cold, there are not many people who become hospital patients unless there is something the matter with them.” Honor your patient’s symptoms, even if they don’t yet fit a known diagnosis, because they matter to the patient.

Here are some tips to care for the patient:

- Let them know your **name** and your **role**. While I think there is value in the democratizing element of everyone wearing scrubs, it is important that your patient recognize you as their doctor. This is one reason we have issued you those bright, red, and bold DOCTOR badges.
- Look for things that **connect** you to your patient – humanizing yourself will humanize your patients.
- Ask for **permission** before examining your patient. Explain what you are doing and stop if you sense discomfort. Seek permission to continue.
- There may be others in the room – sometimes you may not be sure if this is a spouse, a sibling, or other relative or friend. It is best to inquire if you can talk freely or whether visitors should leave the room. Be particularly careful with **sensitive diagnoses** like HIV infection.
- Raise the bed when you examine your patients (it will save your back!) but remember to lower it when you are done. Rearrange the blankets. Put their socks back on. Ask if they need anything – perhaps that water jug needs to be refilled. **Small kindnesses** go a long way.

Patient-Centered Care



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Caring for the patient can only be sustained by caring for the caregiver. This idea underscores the efforts directed toward resident wellbeing and toward a cultural change to promote psychological safety at work. There should be no fear of repercussions or retaliation for raising concerns. There should be the assurance of a safe and comfortable clinical learning environment. There should be freedom from toxic quizzing (aka “pimping”), belittling, or shaming. [Socrates Was Not a Pimp](#). Teaching by intimidation degrades the learning environment and is at odds with adult learning theories. Politely call it out when you see it. Your evaluations of faculty and rotations are anonymous and are designed to elicit your candid feedback. Use these spaces for constructive feedback. Narratives like “the attending had valuable input but often interrupted my presentations before I would fully explain my thoughts” are more valuable than a dispositional attribution like “rude attending.”

We love that you are here and embarking on this voyage to be the best physician you can be. Our entire team is here to cheer you on.

Do not hesitate to contact me directly at any time. I am looking forward to our scheduled intern firm lunches. To make a personal one-on-one appointment with me, use this link: <https://calendly.com/salahuddin-kazi/office-hours>. If these times don’t work for you, please contact @Cydney Sutherland to schedule a meeting.

Warm wishes,

Dino Kazi