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# The Simplicity of Caring

While completing an assignment recently, I came across a quote from the original law of Hippocrates:

“Instruction in medicine is like the culture of the productions of the earth. For our natural disposition, is, as it were, the soil; the tenets of our teacher are, as it were, the seed; instruction in youth is like the planting of the seed in the ground at the proper season; the place where the instruction is communicated is like the food imparted to vegetables by the atmosphere; diligent study is like the cultivation of the fields; and it is time which imparts strength to all things and brings them to maturity.”

Throughout medical school, I have come across a variety of teachers and physician attendings, all with their own lessons to teach, and from these teachers I draw the qualities that I want to embody. Some that I have observed spend enough time in a patient’s room merely to justify their bill, never rolling up the sleeves of their suit or stopping to explain their role in patient care. When I would visit the patients, they would sometimes admit they could not actually remember who their primary physician was. There are some physicians however that have left a lasting impression on me of how I want to treat my patients.

During a month of inpatient nephrology at Pennsylvania Hospital, I rotated with a very memorable nephrologist. She was a tiny waif of a lady

wearing gorgeous European style dresses and dangling bracelets and necklaces, who swept into the dialysis unit each morning with a smile and a word of greeting for each of her nurses and long-term patients. Although I was already well on my path to becoming a physician when I met Dr. Patrascu, she has shaped the kind of physician I want to be.

Dr. Patrascu was well-liked and even loved throughout the hospital by other physicians, residents, nursing staff, and of course the patients who would run up and hug her in the hallways, declaring their love for her. On one memorable occasion, our team was seeing a lady in the cardiac intensive care unit following heart surgery with concerns that her kidneys were suffering after a spell of low blood pressure.

As I am learning, there is a delicate balance between the volume that can be sent through a damaged heart without spilling into the lungs and the volume of blood that the kidneys need to function. A tip too far in either direction can push a stable patient into heart or kidney failure. This is a balance that nephrologists have spent years learning and making their living on. Dr. Patrascu explained this complicated balance to our sweet

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old lady patient in the ICU three times in slightly different ways until she understood, and thanked Dr. Patrascu profusely for her time and genuine concern.

There is no need to undo stress while you are healing, and having four different physicians followed by troops of students file in and out of your room can be very stressful, especially if you do not understand why you have so many and do not understand in fact what is going wrong in your body. I greatly admired the way Dr. Patrascu took the time to sit on each patient's bed, hold their hand, and give an explanation of what was happening inside their body, and offer reassurance and comfort. She is the only physician I have seen sit in silence holding a patient's hand and offer true and honest comfort without words.

The section of Hippocratic law I quoted above puts into words the necessity of physician teachers, and how their words and guidance shape how we as students and then residents grow and mature. Physicians like Dr. Patrascu inspire me to remain human as I treat my patients, and to teach my students to embody these values as well.