

Practicing the Art of Healing

By Dr. J.C Goodwin

The word "Doctor" is derived from the latin *doctus*, which means teacher.

The word "Physician" means one skilled in the art of healing. The word "Dentist" I think must mean one who is a tooth mechanic, because it seems as if we spend much of our day fixing things that are broken. I much prefer the definitions provided from the first two.

Having been involved in dentistry, both public health and private practice since 1984, I can certainly attest to the fact that, in addition to attempting to run a business, manage a staff and stay current with training, we do indeed spend the bulk of our day fixing things. Mostly broken teeth, but we also frequently are repairing cases of fractured confidence when we empower someone with knowledge to better care for themselves and prevent disease, or soothing bruised esteem

who seek our attention, our advice, and our ministrations.

Notice that I said that patients seek "advice." I believe that most health care providers, with the obvious exception of psychologists, psychiatrists, and other psych-prefixed specialties, are not typically trained in the art of communication and may in fact not recognize the importance of the time spent issuing counsel, sharing information, and yes...teaching.

I tend to talk too much. Go figure! My staff knows to provide me with covert and often overt signals when I run behind and it is difficult to strike a balance between helping people to be able to make informed decisions and performing the mechanical art that is my trade. Unfortunately, unlike attorneys, I don't get paid for talking or for my time per se, and the reality that I must drill to pay the bills often interferes with my intent to teach and comfort.

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by restoring and improving smiles, or most commonly, attempting to bolster a damaged spirit when dealing with the fearful.

At best, we dentists are usually ill-equipped to properly manage the overtly fearful patient, though the bulk of our clientele probably fits the definition. Each of us, I am sure, does his/her best to help patients cope and has developed his/her own personal technique out of necessity. A hand on the arm, acknowledgment, reassurance, (and, of course, the occasional prescription for appropriate drugs) are all examples of our often feeble attempts to placate and soothe a wounded psyche. It is not our fault, we just don't know any better and we tend to lose sight of the fact that for us what is routine is, for you, a singular and significant event. Invasive. Intimate. Frightening.

I don't claim to have any expertise in this field and, in fact, have failed miserably on occasion. What I can share is that I have learned the hard way that patience with patients takes effort and practice and may be the greatest gift we can share with those

In the end, I believe we as physicians of all types must not lose sight of the fact that our true mission is to practice the art of healing and that the best medicine may be a gentle hand on the arm. **QCBN**



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