

The Impatient Patient

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I had a meeting with a surgeon yesterday to see about the removal of a tumor from my finger. After leaving, I was confused as to why I was experiencing so much sadness. There were obvious reasons having to do with fear, pain, worry, etc. But, I was left with something larger that was bothering me.

Upon reflection, I realized that I was treated as a finger and not a human being. Nor was I able to connect with the doctor as a person. Rather, I dealt with a specialist who was in a hurry; a marvelously skilled technician with a timetable to meet. Upon reflection I was struck by a deep sense of mutual loss. Clearly the doctor missed out on knowing me and I wasn't permitted to know him. There simply wasn't time for either. It's just not possible in a 15 minute appointment. Nor was there a recognition that such a level of relationship would, in any way, be valuable.

Here my sadness deepened. Aren't human relationships the point? Look at it this way: if you subtract human relationship from any human activity, what are you left with? What, really, is left behind? Equipment, techniques, and skills ... in service of ... what?

Consider the basic language of medical relationships. Patient. Practice. I am to be patient while the doctor practices. At this point I am an impatient patient. Dear Doctor, "Is there enough room in your practicing for my basic humanity? After all, it is *my* finger that needs your help. Please note that this particular finger is attached to me. We're a package deal."

I fear that I'm failing at being patient. I am no longer willing to wait for you to take the effort and the time to know me.