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Stepping Up

There are three classes of intellect: one which comprehends itself; another that appreciates what others comprehend; and a third which neither comprehends by itself nor by the showing of others; the first is the most excellent, the second is good, the third is useless.

Machiavelli

Most of the time, we just attend to the next thing in the queue. Sometimes, something special arises that needs more than the ordinary level of attention. Those times offer an opportunity to do something outstanding—either good or bad. Recognizing the moment, preparing the response, and delivering the goods requires a special sensitivity. Everybody can do it, but few respond to the challenge.

To notice the offhand remark, the unusual presentation of a clinical problem, or that there is something missing (or extra) in this image, requires a multilevel awareness of the surroundings. In the midst of a busy schedule, we may only catch a few of the signals being sent. The broad-band receiver of the senses that focuses on just the immediate situation, however, can be tuned to all frequencies simultaneously to receive and decode the signals that this situation is special. Once the receptors sense the signal, the response is on its way.

The interactions requiring special attention are particularly apparent when a previously healthy person becomes a patient. That person is now a stranger in a strange land—a frightening place with no road map. With no specific destination in this place, there is only one wish: to get better.

The sights, the smells, the awesome machines and the language of “medspeak” are intimidating. The trappings of medicine coupled with the implications of the “problem” are humbling influences. When faced with these factors, patients need therapy. One treatment, reported effective in an uncontrolled series of patients, injects a positive perspective. The treatment is administered by looking the patient in the eye and taking the extra few moments to answer questions. In some cases, relief is immediate; in others, it requires repeated applications over a period of time. Although this approach has not been submitted for FDA approval, it has been endorsed by the Association of Caring Healthcare Operators and Organizers (ACHOO).

Offering this kind of one-on-one frank talk is difficult. It requires feeling comfortable with one’s self, emerging from behind the mask and stepping up to the task of helping the patient through the difficult process we call healing.

H. William Strauss, Editor
The Journal of Nuclear Medicine