

It is the Economy Attitude, Stupid

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This editorial begins with apologies to former President Clinton's campaign manager James Carville for the paraphrasing of his now famous motto.

A patient was required to remain unmoving for several hours after a cardiac catheterization. Her glasses and dinner were on the bed tray which was moved by the nurse when vital signs were taken. The tray was not returned to its original place, the patient didn't get to eat dinner. While she never got dinner, she did get a headache from trying to see without her glasses.

The Out Patient waiting room was filled when the phlebotomist came to the doorway and yelled, "Pat". Three women and one man rose from their chairs. They all looked at each other and the phlebotomist who then called out the last name. Three people sat down, embarrassed.

Another patient told the phlebotomist that she was acutely allergic to adhesives. The phlebotomist put on a strip of tape, saying that this one wouldn't be a problem. The woman stood up, peeled the tape off in front of the phlebotomist, and they both watched her skin bleed as she threw the tape away.

A woman was seated by her husband's bed as they waited nervously for a bone marrow biopsy. A person from the laboratory entered the room, set up the biopsy tray, and assisted the physician in the collection of the specimen. The wife later said, "Who was that in the teddy bear pajamas? If anything she does is ever correct, it must be a miracle. Who could trust a person dressed like that? If they don't care about the impression that they make, how can you be sure that they care about their work?"

One older woman was sitting, half clothed of course, when she was introduced to her new physician, a man who looked like her grandson but who called her by her first name. She was uncomfortable, embarrassed, and quickly forgot all of her carefully rehearsed questions in order to get out of the examining room as soon as possible.

What do all of these examples have in common? We seem to spend so much time worrying about the lack of respect we receive from our colleagues. Have we ever thought about the respect we give or do not give to others? We worry that no one

knows who or what we are. Do we appreciate the image we project to others? We preach to each other that we are professionals. Do we look it? Do we act it? Do we speak it? How can we expect to receive respect from others if we do not make the attributes of respect part of our every day behavior?

The view from the bed rather than the bedside can be quite enlightening, for the loss of control colors everyone and everything. What the CQI guru might describe as friendliness might seem to a patient as intrusion. "Honey" is seen as a derogative or worse yet, a signal that the provider in question does not even care enough about you to know your name. And, of course, "our" forgetfulness or stress when failing to return the room to its previous state can very well be seen as callousness or disregard.

Why is this important? One reason is that all of those examples listed in the first part of the editorial occurred within two weeks of each other which suggests disrespect is common. Another reason is that three of those examples occurred to one person which posits the thought that this problem is as deeply ingrained as it is widespread.

Ignoring the obvious that the correct action is just simple human compassion and caring, the people whom we want to recognize us as professionals are our patients. If our patients speak positively of clinical laboratorians to their physicians, their nurses, and the facility's quality managers, the message will get through. If our patients recognize us as professionals who treat each of them as important, then our field becomes important to each patient. Based on family values then, the right students will decide that this field is a good one. When that happens, the way we treat each other will also change. When we start treating ourselves as professionals, others will follow.

Professionalism is more than getting the results right. It is more than coming to work on time or answering the phone on the first ring. It is more than doing exactly what is expected. Professionalism is not false friendliness. It is not dressing for your comfort, but for the patient. It is not false arrogance, but confidence. It is not simply obeying rules for the sake of obeying rules. It is understanding the needs of coworkers and helping them satisfy their needs. It is an attitude that spills over from our work into our daily lives as we treat all people as well as we treat our patients.

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