

'Doctor Time' — The Power Begins Here



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One hour. One hour and a quarter. Seventy-five minutes I've squirmed in my doctor's reception room, first one cheek, then the other. The eclectic reading material that consisted of *Family Circle*, *Redbook* and a three-week-old copy of *Time* was exhausted in the first half-hour. I now know more than I ever wanted to about estrogen replacement therapy and could make a cherry pie, Billy Boy if I had to.

What is it with these guys? Like, he's not even a surgeon — how many emergencies can an internist have? Ten o'clock, the receptionist said when I called for the appointment. Apparently this is doctor time and has no counterpart in the real world except wife time, which has to do with shopping or getting ready to leave the house.

I haven't actually seen this in the curriculum, but I believe there is a course in medical school where future physicians are taught how to use time to their advantage. In a single semester they could discover that the worth of the patient's time is inconsequential, whereas the doctor's time is **pure gold**.

This could be incorpo-

rated in the course content of "The Waiting Room — The Power Begins Here."

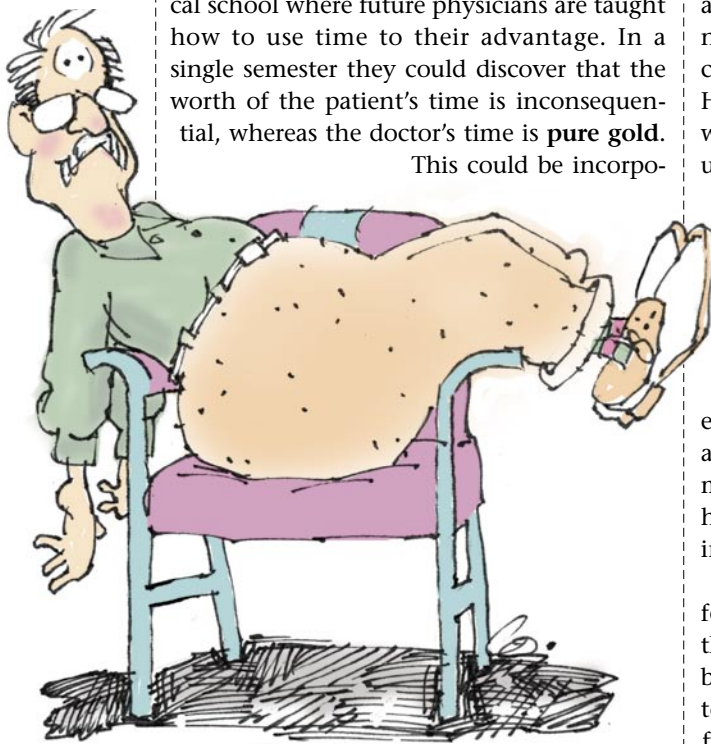
In what seemed like the amount of time it took me to finish the seventh grade, but is only 10 minutes doctor time (one-and-a-half-hours real time), a squarish woman sporting some Nautilus-inspired figure enhancements opened the door to the inner sanctum. "Mr. Horseman, will you please come this way." In some hipper offices I've bivouacked in, a comely miss barely out of puberty addressed me as Robert and seemed pleased when I blurted, "Call me Bob, Janey," indicating that the three-generation difference in our ages was no barrier to our relationship.

Miss Muscle Beach led me right onto a scale, fiddled with the weights for a while and announced my gross tonnage to the world at large, ignoring my protests that my wingtips alone weigh five pounds apiece and my loose change, pocket knife, and nail clippers would account for another couple of pounds at the least. "Sure, Mr. Horseman," she said crisply, writing down what the scale had wrongly estimated and ushered me into yet another room, known in medical parlance as a "cubicle."

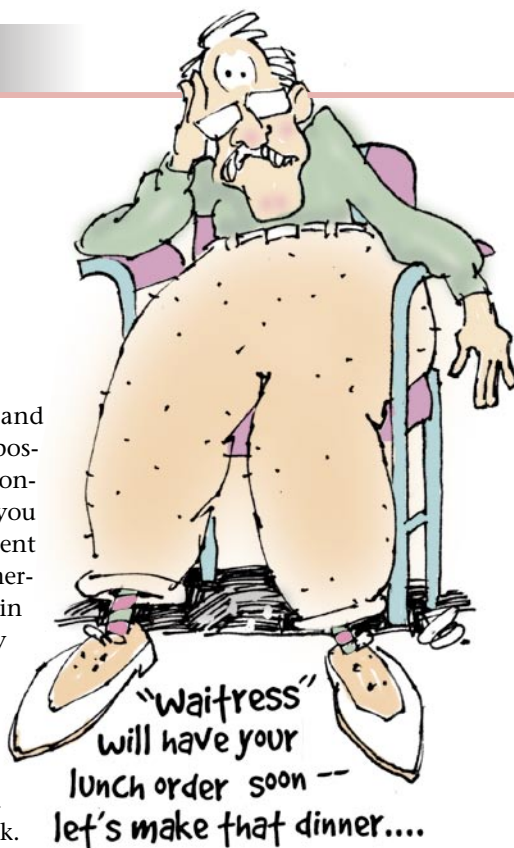
Only the medical profession has a series of waiting rooms, each one smaller and more Spartanly appointed than its predecessor. This one would be considered appropriate for solitary confinement in any federal pen if the ambience were just a bit more cheerful. There are no windows for one thing, so after the maze of hallways we negotiated arriving here, it's difficult to place myself spatially in the world as I used to know it.

This is the Motel 6 of treatment rooms featuring a little stool with six casters for the doctor to scoot around on and a square backless bench that I assumed was for me to park on while I scanned the bare walls, furtively looking for an escape route and calculating how many years I have left of my sentence. There was one of those tables that physicians acquire when they first go into

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"Taxi driver" will get you on your way after he has finished today's New York Times crossword puzzle....



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practice, covered in brown vinyl and then draped with that crinkly disposable wax paper so you wouldn't wonder about what the patient before you was here for. The magazine assortment provided in Stalag 2 is even less generous and the issues are older than in Holding Pen No. 1. That left only a few doctor accessories to hold my attention. A jar with tongue depressors, another with cotton balls, and one with a few inches of isopropyl alcohol were arranged on the countertop next to the sink. Adjacent was the little triangle-shaped mallet for reflex testing and that sophisticated flashlight for peering in your ear and up your nose. There also was a rubber glove and a tube of KY jelly for what purpose I can't imagine. They seem to have done away with the leeches.

I mentally compared my own treatment room with its \$75,000 worth of dental equipment to the monk-like austerity of my current cell. If I wasn't ill when I came in here, that alone would induce a bout of clinical depression. The nurse abruptly returned, probably from lunch and interrupted my reverie with the command to open my mouth for the purpose of inserting a thermometer. "I'll be back in a moment," she lied.

During the next 15 minutes of restlessly pacing in random patterns about my little enclosure, I rotated the thermometer from side to side like an all-day sucker and took it out occasionally to see how I was doing. You'd think, after 200 years, that somebody would have made an oral thermometer that could be read by people with normal vision. This one seemed permanently affixed at 98.6, what else? I was tempted to throw a little drama into the proceedings by holding a Zippo under the thing for a few seconds or dunking it in the alcohol and blowing on it, but the arrival of Ms.

appearing not busy and important, and perhaps flaunting years of medical protocol, you might try considering the radical idea that patients' time is as critical to them as yours is to **CDA**

Nightingale thwarted me.

"Doctor will be with you in a moment," she chuckled, pleased that everything was going according to the Master Plan of Patient Subjugation. And sure enough, in less time that it took to ratify the 18th Amendment, The Man Himself entered, wearing a stethoscope about his neck like the sommelier in an expensive bistro would display his key to the wine cellar.

"Take off your shirt," he said, cutting right to the chase and skipping the part about being devastated for keeping me waiting and begging my forgiveness. All the snippy remarks I had been rehearsing were tempered by lack of opportunity to express them between the tongue blade invasion and the up-your-nose scope. Besides, you just can't tear into The Doctor for not having mastered the art of patient management. Getting him annoyed at you is certainly not in your best interests, even with the KY jelly. Probably Hippocrates got the idea for his oath from hearing a few of those from his waiting patients.

You go see the doctor, you wait, and you do it in special rooms built just for that sort of thing. That's the way it works; that's tradition. If you want to run the risk in your own practice of