



My story begins around the turn of the twentieth century. It was during this era that Dr. William Osler has been frequently quoted as saying “Listen to your patient, he is telling you the diagnosis.”

True then.

True today.

Practicing medicine has taught me many things, but Dr. Osler’s simple words have imbued in me the heart of how I practice as a Family Practitioner. His words have carried me through many situations.

A nervous patient may be in my exam room, sometimes frightened, with many concerns on his or her mind.

I smile, welcome the patient and sit down.

Then I wait a beat.

At first, the patient will speak slowly, and then the words tumble out. My own tranquil waiting encourages this flow.

As my patient tells his story, he/she becomes more relaxed, settling back into the chair. Several minutes may pass as the patient expresses his concerns.

My next comment, depending on the individual patient, of course, would be something like,

“If I could wave the New England Journal of Medicine over your head and take away one of your complaints, which would it be?”

This is a good beginning for our doctor-patient conversation.

Like so many other physicians are experiencing, COVID vaccinations have taken on a life of their own. Even after all my centuries (I am old!) of practice, I encounter vaccine denial. When I hit the wall of a refusal, I listen carefully. Then, address each concern. Sometimes I am successful. Sometimes not.

A Bedrock of Family Medicine is treating the patient as I would want myself or a loved one to be treated.

All calls are returned on the same day.

If I know that someone is anxiously awaiting a test result, that patient is contacted as soon as possible. If the result arrives late Friday afternoon and it is happy result, that call is made immediately. But, if it is something negative, I wait until Monday.

I have found that if I have to deliver bad news, it eases things if we can immediately plan a course of action. Maybe we need further tests. Maybe the patient needs referral to a specialist. Having a course of action brings hope. Far better than delivering a negative result on a Friday night and not being able to present an immediate course of action. Weekends are not meant for worries!

Patients have the rightful expectation of being listened to. They have the right to be treated as I expect my own loved ones to be treated; with courtesy, kindness, compassion, and understanding.

And true to my heritage from my education at the Chandler Medical Center, Lexington, Kentucky, I never forget the continued emphasis on being a “complete” or “holistic” physician.

Thank you, Dr. Osler for repeatedly emphasizing that we must listen to our patients; and if we listen carefully, the patient will tell us the diagnosis.