



John Hickner, MD, MSc
Editor-in-Chief

“Will you pray with me, Doctor?”

Last week, a patient asked me to pray with her, and I did. That, in itself, made the visit extraordinary. But the time spent getting to know this patient over the course of several visits is the real family medicine story I want to share with you.

I first met 52-year-old Thelma a few months ago as a new patient. She had a 25-year history of chronic back and leg pain stemming from an auto accident. She had made the usual rounds to pain consultants, tried numerous medications, and undergone multiple procedures—but still had daily pain. I was starting to get that uneasy

We need to stay open to the possibility that a patient's own treatment plan may be superior to the one we come up with.

feeling that she would be difficult to manage.

She was taking gabapentin, which provided minimal pain relief, but no narcotics. She also had large fibroids that caused iron deficiency, but the iron tablets she'd been taking made her sick to her stomach.

Her initial hemoglobin was 5.4 g/dL. I switched her to an oral iron supplement she could tolerate. A repeat pelvic ultrasound showed even larger fibroids than 3 years ago, so I thought she was probably headed for surgery, and I asked her to come back to discuss it. I also

asked her to try amitriptyline 10 mg/d at bedtime, which might help her pain and improve her poor sleep.

I was wrong on both accounts, as I discovered during the “prayer visit.” When I walked into the exam room, I noticed Thelma was reading her pocket bible. I greeted her with, “Hello, Thelma. Good to see you.” Then I added, “I see you are reading a good book.” She said Yes, and put it away as I proceeded with the interview. Yes, she was tolerating the iron supplement just fine and her hemoglobin was up to 9.2 g/dL. No, the amitriptyline was not working and she didn't like to take drugs anyway.

She explained that God helped her to manage her pain—with help from her daughter and granddaughter. She also told me she didn't want surgery for the fibroids. “God will shrink them for me,” she said. (And she was right, as she was approaching menopause.)

“Will you pray with me, Dr. Hickner?” she asked.

I was touched that she trusted me enough to ask me to pray with her, and so I agreed. Thelma's request also reminded me how important it is to get to know our patients in a personal way, and to explore their ideas about treatments rather than sticking to our own narrow medical repertoire.

Thelma's treatment plan was different than I anticipated. In fact, I am humbled to say that it was far superior to mine.

John Hickner
jfp.eic@gmail.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

JOHN HICKNER, MD, MSc
University of Illinois at Chicago

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

BERNARD EWIGMAN, MD, MSPH
University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine

JOHN SAULTZ, MD
Oregon Health and Science University, Portland
(*Clinical Inquiries*)

RICHARD P. USATINE, MD
University of Texas Health Science Center
at San Antonio (*Photo Rounds*)

ASSISTANT EDITORS

DOUG CAMPOS-OUTCALT, MD, MPA
Mercy Care Plan, Phoenix

GARY N. FOX, MD
St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center, Toledo,
Ohio

RICK GUTHMANN, MD, MPH
University of Illinois, Chicago

KEITH B. HOLTEN, MD
Berger Health System, Circleville, Ohio

ROBERT B. KELLY, MD, MS
Fairview Hospital, a Cleveland Clinic hospital

GARY KELSBERG, MD, FAAFP
University of Washington, Renton

E. CHRIS VINCENT, MD
University of Washington, Seattle

EDITORIAL BOARD

FREDERICK CHEN, MD, MPH
University of Washington, Seattle

LARRY CULPEPPER, MD, MPH
Boston University Medical Center, Mass

THEODORE G. GANIATS, MD
University of California—San Diego,
La Jolla, Calif

JEFFREY T. KIRCHNER, DO, FAAFP, AAHIVS
Lancaster General Hospital, Lancaster, Pa

FRED MISER, MD, MA
The Ohio State University, Columbus

KEVIN PETERSON, MD, MPH
University of Minnesota, St. Paul

GOUTHAM RAO, MD, MPA
University of Chicago

LINDA SPEER, MD
University of Toledo, Ohio

JEFFREY R. UNGER, MD, ABFP, FACE
Unger Primary Care Private Medicine, Rancho
Cucamonga, Calif

BARBARA P. YAWN, MD, MSC
Olmsted Medical Center, Rochester, Minn

DIRECT INQUIRIES TO:

Frontline Medical Communications
7 Century Drive, Suite 302
Parsippany, NJ 07054
Telephone: (973) 206-3434
Fax: (973) 206-9378