

LET COMPASSION BE OUR GUIDE

As we go through our busy days have you ever tried to quantify the number of decisions one has to make in caring for our patients? Many patients present with multiple problems, concerns and require that we adequately address all implications of their conditions, make sure they are doing what needs to be done for preventative care, and going through their list of concerns. One may make dozens of decisions on each patient during each encounter.

Patients increasingly bring in internet references, what they read in the paper, or what their friends or family told them they should take. Patients are prompted by every advertisement they see on TV to "ask your doctor" about a medication or medical condition. I don't know about you but every time I see one of these ads my immediate impulse is to throw the remote at the TV.

Patients have many expectations when they see their physician. Patients expect that we are proficient, that we are able to correctly diagnose and know the correct and best treatment for their medical conditions and concerns, and they expect us to be up-to-date on the latest intervention, medication, and procedure or testing.

Fulfilling these expectations, making the dozens of decisions every 15 minute appointment, plus dealing with the continued demands of the business of medicine uses up our emotional energy.

Yet our patients expect more from us, they wish to be listened to, and need the physician to show compassion.

Compassion

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French or Late Latin; Anglo-French, from Late Latin *compassion-*, *compassio*, from *compati* to sympathize, from Latin *com-* + *pati* to bear, suffer —

Date: 14th century

Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it

Does this not in many ways define why we do what we do?

Compassion has been shown to be a powerful force in the healing process. Patients respond to the recognition that their physician is sympathetic and cares about their distress. Likewise the physician derives personal satisfaction from the patient interaction.

Much of practice today however pushes the physician away from compassion. I defy anyone to find the coding guidelines where we are reimbursed for showing compassion. I have not seen quality guidelines or disease state management guidelines that lists compassion as a part of the decision tree or treatment protocol.

President's Page – February 2009

Spending more time documenting the patient encounter for medical legal purposes and less time in the patient room does not foster compassion. Showing compassion does not affect increasing practice expenses in face of flat or declining reimbursement. Politicians describing new direction for health care policy in the United States are not talking about compassion as part of the platform. Dealing with managed care denying procedures, drugs or referrals does not foster compassion for our patients.

Yet it is compassion that comes from within us all that has to push back against these forces. Remember to sit down, to listen to your patients, to show them you care. Many times patients are looking for the healing touch as well. Even as simple as listening to their heart and lungs for an unrelated visit gives patients reassurance and has healing powers. The rewards for your patient and yourself are immense.

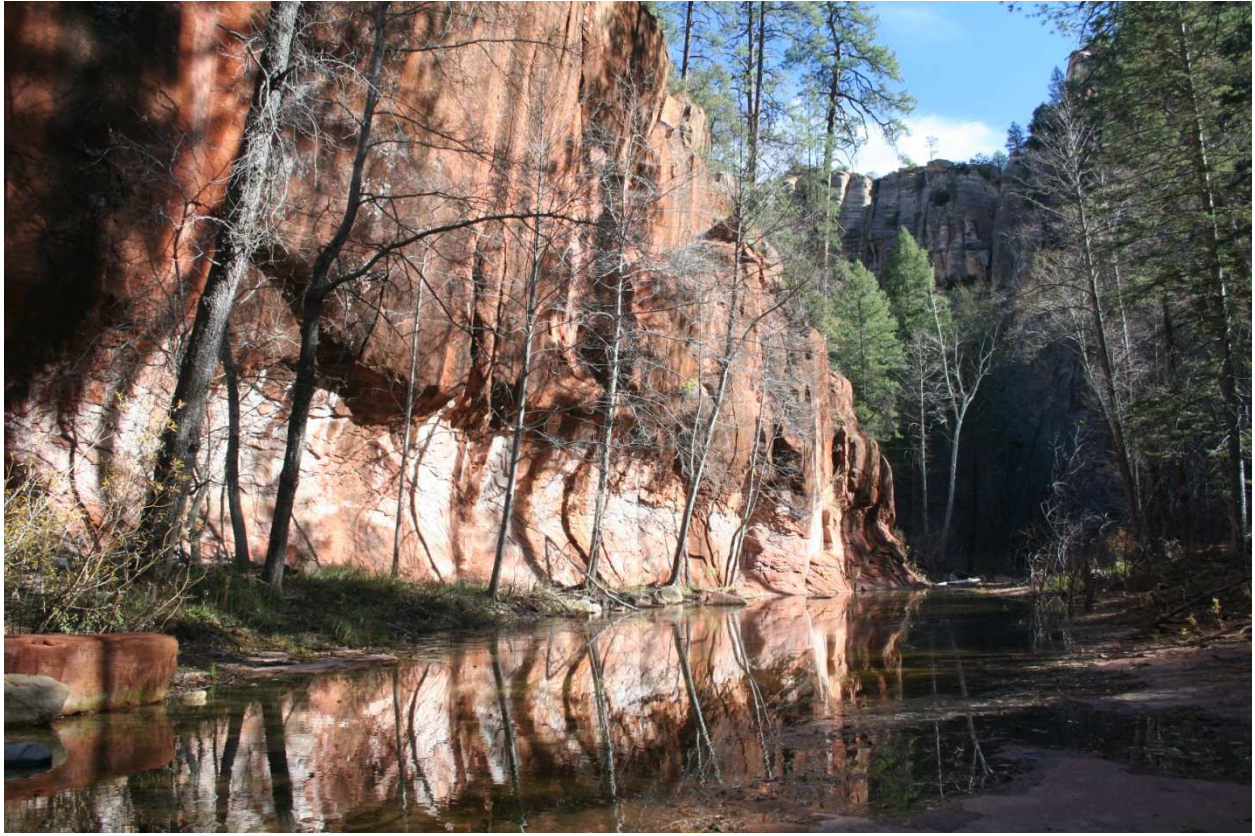
I would recommend a couple of references, the first is "Overcoming Compassion Fatigue" from the American Academy of Family Practice (<http://www.Aafp.org/fpm/20000400/39over.html>), the other a book, *Medicine and Compassion: A Tibetan Lama's Guidance for Caregivers* (Rinpoche, Wisdom Publications)

As we approach the upcoming changes in health care, let us as a profession, allow our compassion for our patients to be our guide in advising policy makers and leaders in the decisions that they will be making. As always I welcome your comments and suggestions contact me at briveland@mcmsonline.com.

Brian R. Riveland, M.D.

President

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." - *Mark Twain*



Sedona West Fork Trail Nov 2005