

Healthcare the Way It Was Meant to Be

Of all the arts, the healing arts are about as personal as you can get. Whether you are a surgeon about to crack a chest, a school nurse worried about a rising temperature, or a street medic first on scene at a cerebral vascular incident, you are not *just* a caregiver to the patient. You are working heart to heart, heart to hurt.

The same is true for the midwife called out in the dark of night, the vet dealing with patients that cannot communicate in easily understood language, or the optometrist who is about to reveal that grass has blades and baseballs can again be caught. Healthcare is personal. That's the way it was meant to be.

Somehow money got in the way. It's always about the money. It doesn't have to be.

When we first moved to the Texas Hill Country, we went looking for a family doctor and were repeatedly referred to Doc Jim, a DO doing business in the small town of Comfort, working from a tiny office right on the main drag. Jim would fix you up right first, and only get to the money as an afterthought. He left me waiting one morning as he sewed up the near-severed finger of a toddler. The conversation seeping through the exam room wall was mostly in Spanish. I understood most of the Spanish and all of the tears.

The worried parents had no insurance and no money but they negotiated for yard work in the summer and homemade tamales during the holidays.

As luck would have it, I was in his office again when the tiny family returned for a follow up. The finger, like the rest of the child, was warm and pink, a good sign.

"I didn't get into this for the money."

Doc Jim had a penchant for the obvious. One look around his office told the story. I think about the time I had to remove chainsaw parts from his exam table or the time Doc Jim showed up at the scene of an MVA (motor vehicle accident) when I was working as an EMT. He was sporting a full white beard grown especially for the annual stock show. He wore a beat-up straw cowboy hat to complement his grass-stained athletic shoes. Pretty or not, I was glad to see him. Of course, there were also those few times when I called him at home on a weekend or in the middle of the night.

He never said more than, "I'll meet you at the office."

That's the way healthcare was meant to be.

We're not saying doctors should post their personal phone number on a billboard, but there may be a middle ground that lies somewhere between routing all calls to an answering service and not having a life.

In future articles we're going to give you a few simple tools for restoring healthcare to the way it was meant to be. We're also going to give you permission to use them!

We're going to give you a positively outrageous Service Prescription! Come on, open wide... this is going to make it all better.