

DISPATCH FROM THE MEDICAL FRONT

Crushed dignity

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This is my dispatch from the internal front. Yes, I am a doctor. But I am a human, too. I feel, like, dislike, love and I get sick too. It would be absolutely weird and abnormal if I didn't.

I might react differently as a doctor. ... But in the end, I am a human.

Three years ago, I made a trip to a Middle East country which changed my life, or was about to, if the physician side of me had not stood up and saved me.

While on the trip, for some reason, I wasn't very careful about my diet and soon had two days of diarrhea.

One month later, I was sitting in my apartment in Ottawa, Ontario, and I experienced severe abdominal pain. It was the most excruciating pain I ever had and kept getting worse and worse.

All doors closed, I felt I had no option left but to go to an emergency room, though I wanted to avoid the same ER I had worked in a night earlier as a doctor. I waited two hours to be triaged by a nurse who treated me as if I was dirt. All tests were normal. The pain went away after a bunch of injections.

Three months later, the pain returned while I was working in the ER. I ended up as a patient, with a bunch of normal tests (including an ultrasound and an esophagogastroduodenoscopy) and injections of hydromorphone and butylscopolamine.

Over the course of the next two years, I visited the ER eight times. Nobody knew what was wrong with me.



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Sleepless nights aren't strictly the purview of doctors or patients.

Each time I went to an ER, I could see what was on my colleagues' minds: here is a drug seeker. That killed me. ... They forgot that I was a colleague and everyone is prone to illness, including any one of them. ... They forgot that I am a human. ... Unfortunately.

On visit nine, I cried. ... Yes, I did. I told the doctor: Do surgery, laparotomy, remove as much as you can from my intestine. I don't want to come back again.

I didn't sleep that night. All I could think about was "what is going on with

me?" It seemed to me that all of it had started happening after that trip to the Middle East. ... Maybe I had chronic giardiasis.

The next day, I asked the doctor about that possibility. He replied, without looking at me, that "no, there is no such thing as chronic giardiasis, only acute giardiasis." He went away. ... I thought: He doesn't want to talk to a drug seeker. The thought hurt. Yes, my friends, it does hurt, when someone thinks you are a drug seeker and you are not.

Before I left, I asked the doctor if he could give me any pain killers, just in case. He handed me a script of six tabs of hydromorphone — yes, six tablets — without looking at me. I swear to God he didn't look at me. ... I left the ER with a different type of pain and crushed dignity.

I spent hours and hours searching for information about chronic giardiasis. I eventually found out that was what was going on with me was a textbook case.

The next day, I convinced a doctor to prescribe metronidazole for me. I took it for seven days.

It is now a year since my last visit to an ER. I have had no problem since the last pill of metronidazole. And by the way, I still have the script for six tabs of hydromorphone.

This is not a complaint. I have met some physicians and nurses who treated me with respect. But we should all remember that there will come a day when we, too, will be the patients. — Jabir Jassam MD, Ottawa, Ont.

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