

## Talking the talk, or what it's like on the other side of the stethoscope

I've been practicing as a PA for the past 30 years in internal medicine, family medicine, and urgent care, and like most of us, I've told hundreds—even thousands—of patients that they need to get this exam done and have that test. “Mr. Jones, you need to have an annual physical.” “Mrs. Jones, when was your last pelvic and Pap smear? It's been that long? You need to have those done.” “Mr. Smith, you're 50 years old, and screening for colon cancer with colonoscopy is recommended.”

I've always advocated that we health care providers should set good examples for our patients. So, when I recently saw



my personal physician for my annual exam and he said, “Now that you're 63 years old and you haven't ever had a screening colonoscopy, I think it's time,” I wanted to ask him if he had had one done. I knew, though, that he was too young to even consider it. So, I gulped, and the blood was drawn and the appointment made.

It's interesting to find oneself on the other side of the stethoscope.

I arrived at my gastroenterologist's office early, as suggested, to fill out all the paperwork, and then I had the privilege of waiting with the other patients for an hour after

my appointment time before I was called back to an exam room. “Mrs. Baker,” the nurse called. Needless to say, she was very apologetic after I stood up and she saw what “Mrs. Baker” looked like. The history was taken; all the questions were answered. The physical exam was performed. The instructions were given for registration as an outpatient and liquids only the day before the procedure. And a prescription for GoLYTELY was provided.

When I purchased the GoLYTELY and listened as the pharmacist explained the instructions about its use, I could almost detect a smirk on his face.

I didn't have a problem following a liquid diet for a day. However, when it came time to drink the GoLYTELY, I began to wonder just how the product got its name. I believe the pharmacist did say that I needed to drink it quickly. A

glassful every 10 to 15 minutes, he said, and it would take effect in an hour. However, my body decided that the GoLYTELY needed to go sooner. I believe the product should have been named GoQUICKLY instead. In the middle of the process, I remembered my mother talking about taking a dose of “salts” to get things working. Could it be they just changed the label?

One other fun part about the whole deal is that you get bone-freezing cold. I don't think it was because I was chasing the GoLYTELY with Gatorade. The air conditioner was off, or at least turned up. It was the middle of August, but I was wearing a sweatshirt because I felt so cold. Yet the thermostat said it was 80 degrees in the house.

Well, I got it all behind me (pun intended), and the next morning, I sat in the outpatient waiting room of the hospital with all the rest of the patients. “Mr. Baker,” the nurse called. They got it right this time. I was escorted back to the staging area, and as I walked, it suddenly dawned on me that even though I felt well, the colonoscopy might show that I wasn't really well. Hmmm. I guess I am human, too. The very pleasant nurse again took a history and started an IV. Then she handed me my “moon pants.” Clever name, don't you think? By the way, I was still cold.

I was placed on a stretcher with a nice warm blanket. I said goodbye to my wife, and I was whisked into the procedure room. The nurse asked if I was ready as the Versed and Demerol were going in. Somebody turned off the lights! Wow! The next thing I knew, the nurse was asking if I was ready to go home. Hey! I just got here. The trip home and the rest of the day were a little fuzzy.

So what's my point? I've done some reflecting on this, and I wonder, do we really appreciate what our patients go through when we order all those wonderful and necessary tests? We might, if we also had our annual exams, and colonoscopies, and all the other screening tests we recommend to them. If we did the same things we ask our patients to do, we might walk a little more humbly and be a little more empathetic. Do we really think that because we have stethoscopes around our necks, we are immune to the things that our patients deal with day in and day out?

I'm now a faculty member in a PA program as well as a clinician and a colonoscopy veteran. I'm thinking of giving each of my PA students an opportunity to drink some GoLYTELY before they go home for the weekend. **JAAPA**

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