

TAKE THE TIME

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Currently, health care in the United States, and elsewhere in the Western world, is being conducted under business principles. Bottom-line economic results, systems analysis, business language about "customers," and time efficiency methods are all the current topics. High technology tools are seen as the answers to shortened physician- or nurse-patient exposure time. We are missing something very basic and essential to healing and wellness.

Time is the single most essential aspect of healing. Each part of the human body, down to DNA molecules, has mechanisms for repair and healing. These mechanisms take time to work properly. A wound takes time to heal. Broken bones take time to mend.

Human relationships take time to develop. It takes time to know someone, to develop trust in another person. It takes time to teach people skills for living: reading, mathematics, proper nutrition, methods of exercise, relationship skills. It takes time for children to grow; it takes time for relationships to grow; it takes time for plants and flowers to grow.

Somehow, we have decided to live with less time for healing, with less time for each patient, with less time for anything but the generation of dollars. We have decided that it's okay to have less time to notice, less time to feel, less time to listen. We have substituted testing for listening, hoping that the laboratory will reveal what lack of time in listening and noticing has kept hidden from our knowledge. We have decided to limit hospital time for patients, limit resting and healing time, limit rehabilitation time, limit home care resources, limit everything except bottom-line economics.

We do health care in the manner of our culture. We behave in health care only in the way in which we behave in our national life. There is no help in department stores; people in markets and gas stations are often surly. School teachers spend time like policemen. Sports is only about winning. We feed school children the food that prevents learning. We harness our human efforts to the buying, selling, and acquisition of things. The less time we spend in any effort, the more things we can do and buy.

Television with its quick bits of information, channel switching, volume overload, information overload, and constant, incessant noise—these are the backgrounds of our existence. The same background is in our hospitals: incessant computer printer noise, paging systems, beeper noises, monitor alarms, constant testing, televisions, no rest time, noisy voices, and constant lights. Hospitals mimic our regular life in modern culture: fast, noisy, agitating.

Time...time to slow...time to listen, quietly...time to rest...time to heal...time to think...time to feel...time to play. We must have time to teach...to learn...to practice...to be. Our children need

unstructured time to play, with time to become creative, apart from passive TV watching. It takes time to travel in the fluid boundaries of a book, to imagine, to see in the mind's eye...it takes time.

Massage takes time, acupuncture takes time, an herbalist evaluation takes time, yoga takes time, a naturopathic physician takes lots of time. People seek these things because they work but also because these practitioners devote time to their practices.

Let us insist that allopathic medicine practitioners get the time needed to properly hear histories, notice diagnoses, and use the rich knowledge of clinical history and physical-oriented medical practice. Let us insist that inpatient and outpatient care get the time to really allow patients to heal. Let us give people the resources to really heal, the most important of which is time.

Pharmaceuticals are incredible: their problems do not outweigh their benefits; they need to be used more appropriately. Technology is amazing: bypass surgery and angioplasty of coronary arteries are incredible ways to give people the time they need for lifestyle changes to allow wellness. We must not denigrate or dismiss these modern tools for health care.

We must continue to call sick and needy people "patients." We must be patient with them. We must give them time to tell their stories. We must give ourselves time to notice and evaluate their problems. We must give ourselves time to provide the tools for healing. We must give patients the time to heal, to use the appropriate tools, to absorb the knowledge, to hear over and over what is needed for healing.

We must take the time for healing and give the time for healing. Time, the key to healing—not expensive, not costly by itself. Perhaps that is why it is not valued by equipment makers, pharmaceutical firms, bankers, insurance companies. If it, by itself, with its intrinsic value, is not valued by our culture, then it will not be allowed in health care.

Take the time to think about this. Take the time to teach it, to model it, to insist on it. Take the time of human being.

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