



Thursday Memo – April 24, 2014

With school vacation in full swing I always hate to offer a local writing and have it get missed - so this week I offer a recent article from the NEJM instead (link below). This piece struck a chord with me. It reminded me of something I always valued in Lisa Gussak's approach to patients, residents and staff - just being human and herself - connecting with folks by being sincere and having fun. With my work in urgent care, I find I have a few seconds to make or break that connection with people if I am going to influence their health decisions. Likewise in the prisons, with savvy patients who are distrustful of most, just the right comment or action can deepen a relationship that is hard to come by. A simple comment of empathy or being impressed by a past accomplishment; noticing a scar or commenting on how someone is looking healthy and fit; joining by sharing a commonality. When I worked for Robert Coles years ago, he could always find a connection with a person; he knew a diner in their town, or had done a study of people in that area and commented on the perseverance of the community. In this article, the authors ask - how is that we come to medicine with such personal skills and common sense and have it drained out of us? Their message reminds us that the way to connect is to return to the most basic of skills - being human.

Wolpaw DR, Shapiro D. [The virtues of irrelevance](#). N Engl J Med. 2014 Apr 3;370(14):1283-5.