



Thursday Memo – September 18, 2014

"Take Home" Patients – Lori DiLorenzo

Lynne was one of the first new patients I met when I came to Gardner. I heard her deep, loud, bellowing voice harassing one of the MA's from my office down the hall. I walked into the exam room and found an imposing, solidly strong, androgynous appearing woman who was clearly under the influence of something. She loudly began by asking me for percocet. I firmly established boundaries as to how I wanted my staff to be treated and that I wouldn't be treating her with pain medication at this time. I expected that I would never see her again.

Instead, we developed one of my favorite doctor-patient relationships. I learned that the gruff exterior hid a heart of gold. This was the woman who got a disability settlement and gave almost all of the money to her children, but not before she anonymously bought baby supplies for another patient in the health center who needed them. She shared stories of her births with me as I became visibly pregnant. We talked about the love of our children. She was sober enough to be functional. She never got control of her diabetes, although she tried, in her way, I think more to please me. She never got controlled substances from me, but I knew she was using various things off and on because her husband also became my patient. They had a kind of love/hate relationship and could be heard arguing in the exam room. One day I asked how they met and got the story of how Lynne had been abused as a teen and had run away from home. Mike's parents took her in. He was away at the time but when he returned home, it was love at first sight. They had four children together and stayed together through poverty and drug use. I looked forward to the booming "Docta D!" I would hear when she came in.

Then one day, Mike came in alone, crying. Lynne had been found dead next to him in bed. He tragically tried to revive her but could not. The autopsy showed various narcotics. It has been several years since her death and Mike is still struggling. The connection which seemed dysfunctional to me was very deep and he misses her tremendously.

Lynne taught me once again not to judge on appearances and first impressions. I too, miss her and I can still hear her calling me as I care for addicts in detox and new moms who are struggling. She gave me the gift of connecting with another human being which is the greatest thing about being a physician.