



Thursday Memo – February 4, 2016

Relationship-based Medicine – by Melissa Rathmell

She was in her early 30s and found a painful lump in her breast. She saw a colleague of mine, because I was not at the office that day – an excellent clinician, but one who did not know my patient. An ultrasound was ordered, which was unremarkable, but the patient was not comforted.

She saw me a few days later, and I felt the lump, ordered a mammogram even though she was barely over 30. The mammogram was entirely negative, but still the patient was not comforted, and neither was I.

The biopsy the next week confirmed cancer. MRI (done after the biopsy) was similarly negative. The missing piece? Family history. I knew that her mother had 2 separate breast cancers in her early 30s, and so suspected a BRCA gene (which was later confirmed). Her daughter is now in her early 20s, and has not been gene tested yet. But, because her PCP knows the family history, hopefully both will have long and happy lives.