



Thursday Memo – April 16, 2015

Brussel Sprouts - by Phil Fournier

I thoroughly enjoy reading the TMM each week and love sharing them with my family, none of whom are in the field of medicine. It is now time for me to contribute.

A patient visit last week reminded me just how much I love my job as a family physician even after 25 years of being “in the business”. This job is so much more than a “business”, it is about building trust and developing relationships with your patients over time. That trust helps them come to us in times of need or just visit us for that once a year “check-up” to share their glee when they finally quit smoking or lost 5 lbs. It is truly a privilege to be a physician.

Mary came in for a visit last week and the nurse handed me the paperwork telling me the patient is in tears saying it was her last visit with me before she moves back to Poland. Her husband died less than a year ago. They would always come in together for their twice a year visits. He is an American and she is from Poland. He spoke some Polish, but I would always use a phone interpreter with her. They were the one of most amazing couples I have ever seen. They both worked at the same company for years. He had recently retired in his early 80’s due to declining health and she retired to take care of him. She is in her late 70’s. The company loved them so much, that they had a limo drive him once a week to work. He remained on the payroll and I am sure he was a great role model for all the other employees. When I asked why they kept working, they said “what else would we do”. This is what we talked about at our visits. Their health issues were mostly stable over the years and they never complained about anything. Even at the end when he suffered from declining health, he never dwelled on it.

One of our most common discussions at our visits was centered on brussel sprouts (brukselka in polish). I am not exactly sure how this topic initially came up, but they loved Brussels sprouts and I really hate them. They talked about how best to prepare them and I countered with it does not matter, I have tried them many ways and the taste is still bad to me. It was always the highlight of my day when they would come in for these discussions. At our last visit she was in tears. She was moving back to Poland to live with her family and was bringing him home to

bury his ashes in her family cemetery. It was difficult for her to be in the office where she had so many visits together with her husband. Too many reminders of him I am sure. She clutched a small picture of him in her hand. I noticed it as I helped her onto the exam table to do my “obligatory” cardiac and lung exam.

I copied some of her medical records so her new doctors would know her current labs and medications. I shared some personal thoughts on how honored I was to be their doctor and how impressed I was with the love they had for each other. We also shared some tears. I closed the visit by telling her that maybe I would have to try brussel sprouts one more time. That brought a smile to her face and we ended the visit with a hug. I am sure the interpreter was confused about that last comment, but I didn’t care this doctoring ‘business’ is all about relationships.