

Forget Me Not

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I have never given very much thought to how forgetful I am. Unless my memory is flawed, I have always been absent-minded. In fact, I have a feeble recollection that I have chronically and frequently been distracted ... perhaps too often.

Stay in the moment, I tell my-self. The new patient is waiting. I walk in and introduce myself. The patient tells me that she has been a patient previously - two years ago, and before that, maybe five or six years ago. I try to act like, "I knew that," but her face tells me she knows I don't remember her.

Now she's face-down on the table. What is her first name again? I walk over to the chart to make sure. Is it Kristen, Kirsten, Kristine? Diane, Diana, Deborah, Dinah? And if her name is Elizabeth, what nickname does she prefer? Liz, Liza, Eliza, Beth or Betty? Margaret? (How *do you* get the nickname "Peggy" out of Margaret?)

I have forgotten important things, like paying taxes. In my second or third year of practice, I forgot to pay my quarterly tax payments. I wasn't making much money, so I suppose sharing my pittance with the government every three months didn't occur to me. My accountant was not really surprised, because I had brought my "bookkeeping" receipts to her in a paper grocery bag. I knew as much about running a small business as a pig knows about pinochle. Perhaps I could not really forget what I didn't know.

Once, I was preparing to go home after a day's work in the office, turning off the lights and ready to lock the door. Then, I remembered that I still had a patient bristling with acupuncture needles, lying in the back room. He had been there about an hour and was not fooled into thinking that more time on the table was a planned treatment strategy. Even more unsettling was that he was a German immigrant who had been a Hitler Youth in the Nazi Party during WWII. I hoped he was not vindictive and did not have a Luger in his coat.

My staff also has gotten me in trouble with forgetfulness. Once, we all went to lunch, leaving a patient in the therapy room, with electrical stimulation on her back. Yes, she did finally figure out that no one was around, and disengaged herself from the Stim unit. Surprisingly, she was quite forgiving and is a patient to this day. (Maybe her loyalty has something to do with the fact that I have not raised her treatment fee in 30 years, since that incident. After all, she could still complain to the board of chiropractic examiners, right?)

These are true stories from my diary of office *faux pas*. But one story is especially embarrassing. My staff and I left for the evening, but the new assistant did not remember that we still had an elderly lady getting dressed in the back room. She reportedly hobbled to the front door on her cane and found it locked. Fortunately, there was a back door that could be opened from inside, but she had to crawl over the front reception counter to get to it. Somehow, she accomplished this feat and made her escape. I know this because it was clearly outlined in her complaint to the board of chiropractic examiners! (Not really. She was a dear about it, and once again reinforced my faith in the capacity of humans to forgive).

A cure for forgetting to take good notes is when a patient returns and says something like, "Doc, do that thing you did last time! It really helped." You look at your notes, and you can't even read your own writing, let alone figure out what technique you used last time.

Has this ever happened to you, doctor? You are daydreaming, treating a patient and you are about to adjust the patient's neck. Then, you ask yourself, "Did I already adjust the patient's neck or not?!" Have you ever said to a patient, "I think it is about time we got an MRI," but the patient reminds you that he already had an MRI three months ago? Does this happen to other chiropractors, or am I the only bemused jughead out there?

I feel better by recalling the story of an internist who was reporting the diagnostic findings to a patient in the hospital. The patient was suffering from a bowel disorder. The internist sat on the edge of the hospital bed and summarily said, "Mrs. Kopopkins, we have determined that you have a 'locked bowel.'" The patient was confused. "But doctor, I have diarrhea!" The internist was taken aback, but quickly had a response. "Of course, because you see, it is locked in the 'open' position!"

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