

Watching You: What Do Your Patients See?

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One of the questionable side benefits of traveling is too much time waiting in airports, something I've mentioned in several of my previous reports of my findings over the years. While there are several ways to put that time to good use, occasionally one needs to take the opportunity to look around and just observe their surroundings. In doing so, you inevitably see people - lots and lots of people, most of them on their way to somewhere else, of course.

You can discover quite a bit about people as you watch them walk by. In addition to their expressions and how they are dressed, how they walk can actually be quite revealing. In many ways, walking patterns reveal our intentions; what we are thinking and what we are trying to accomplish as we walk.

In most airports, people's walking patterns tell you a bit about who they are and even what is important to them:

- *Going Somewhere* - these are the people who walk quickly and deliberately. They are usually business people on their way to a connecting flight or a business meeting. People generally get out of their way to avoid being run over.
- *Happy Wanderers* - they walk about the airport (many times with a cell phone to their ear), seemingly in no hurry to get anywhere. They are almost oblivious to the *Going Somewhere* types and occasionally get run over by them, which is the inevitable consequence when someone walking with a purpose meets someone walking with no purpose whatsoever.
- *Look at Me* - it's clear that these people are walking (and usually dressing) to be noticed. These folks, usually younger, seem to pass by multiple times for reasons unapparent to most.
- *Dazed and Confused* - this crowd is not sure where they are going; they look at the departure monitors multiple times (as if their gate may change radically at any minute), and appear generally unsure of how to function in an airport.

If you are older, how you walk can actually reveal how much longer you are going to live. [An interesting new study](#) has found an "association between gait speed and survival."¹ And while deliberately increasing your gait has not yet been shown to increase your life, the results of this study are another indication of the revealing nature of how we walk.

Let's turn the conversation to your practice for a moment and consider how you walk - and the impact/influence it can have on your patients. As you walk around your office, you reveal yourself to those who are watching, both patients and staff. Your walk can be the essence of the first impression for new patients, for better or worse. It can reveal how you feel about your day, particularly if you have a negative gait.

Worse yet, how you walk can be misconstrued by patients as an indication of how you feel about them. Walk up too quickly and they may see you as abrupt, in a hurry and with little time for their needs. Walk up too slowly and you may be seen as tired, old or disinterested.

Take it from someone who has been a chiropractic patient for more than half a century. We patients read a lot into how you carry yourself - particularly on our first visit, but to some extent on

every visit. If your focus is anywhere but on us, we can tell. We may not ever tell you, but you convey more by how you move than what you say, and it affects how we perceive you, our impressions of you as a person and a doctor, and [the relationship we have with you](#).

Take some time every morning before you see your first patient to set the tone for the day. Ensure that your attitude (and the attitudes of your staff) is deliberate, confident and assuring. Make those qualities evident by the way you talk, walk and move.

As you walk, think about the larger presence of chiropractic and healing that surrounds you. Remind yourself of what you look to convey before you see each patient.

Walk with pride. You are part of the greatest health care profession in the world. You represent a lifestyle choice that is only embraced by chiropractic; a choice that is growing in popularity and scientific validation. You represent a choice made by your patients for good reasons. Let your patients (and staff) see you walk the talk. They *are* watching. n

Reference

1. Studenski S, Perera S, Patel K, et al. Gait speed and survival in older adults. *JAMA*, Jan. 5, 2011;305(1):50-8. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21205966
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