

Dr. Hanks and Dr. Hyde

John Hanks, DC

I could tell the new patient was annoyed with me; when I entered the exam room, he didn't even look up from the *National Geographic* he was reading. The elderly man had waited 45 minutes, so I couldn't blame him for being ticked off. I apologized profusely (to the point of sounding stupid), but it still took considerable time before he warmed up to me. The reason? He was a jerk.

I want patients to like me. I don't say anything when they track talcum powder all over my carpet in their stocking feet, and I leave the room when a patient needs another 10 or 20 minutes to finish a cellphone conversation. Patients are my customers, and my staff and I fall all over ourselves to please them. Even if we are having a rotten day, we make sure the patients come first. That's what we get paid to do.

However, I occasionally imagine a day when Dr. Hanks might be allowed to become "Dr. Hyde," as in the classic tale of dichotomy, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Take that new patient, for example. I probably told him something like, "I am so sorry you had to wait, but we've had a chaotic day, and I take it seriously when patients have to wait this long (etc., etc.), so I hope you understand."

But after this new patient treated me so shabbily, what I wanted to say was: "Listen buster, I've been working over hot, sweaty backs all day, with patients needing extra help with their insurance; crying; losing their jobs; and one trying to overcome the death of a husband. People are showing up late; I didn't get any sleep last night; I'm weak from getting over the flu; and the last thing I need is a mean, unforgiving old coot monopolizing my time and whining about how you forgot your checkbook!"

That's what Dr. Hyde would have said. Dr. Hyde also might have posted the following directions for patients at the front desk:

The Rules

You will be discharged as a patient if:

- you are uninteresting, humorless, disagreeable and unappreciative;
- you complain about my fees, or hesitate to pay your copayments;
- you cannot get off your cellphone within 15 seconds of my entering the room; or
- you track talcum powder on my rug with your stocking feet.

Now, for the test: I've turned into Dr. Hyde, and enter a treatment room with a regular patient who has always been difficult. He has obviously read "The Rules."

"Doc, have you heard the joke about the frog and the saucepan?"

"Yes, and it's lame and pornographic. You're discharged."

In the next room, I find a long-time female patient who is always late, sloppy and unappreciative. "You have never referred me one patient in 15 years," I say. "You talk incessantly at the front desk, distract my staff, and use the most foul-smelling perfume I have ever encountered. My clothes reek of it, and my wife wonders if I'm having an affair. Please leave."

She is speechless, but Dr. Hyde doesn't have time to worry about it. The next treatment room reveals a young woman cowering in the corner, talking on her cellphone. She knows she is being naughty, but she just can't give the call up. "Uh-huh, uh-huh," she keeps saying to her caller, while she fixes a frightened eye on me.

I walk over to her, grab the phone, and smash it under my heel. "Better luck with the next chiropractor," I say.

Have you ever looked at your appointment book, and seen maybe four or five "time-wasters," bad personalities, or loudmouths, all scheduled one right after the other? Dr. Hyde would cancel those patients and go to a movie - but you and I will sigh, stand up a little straighter, and take care of them, just like we always do. Why? Because we know we're lucky to have them as patients in the first place!

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