



Perspective

Small Moments of Human Connection Make all the Difference

By J. Daren Covington, DO

As someone who has been on all sides of medicine as a patient, as a father, and as a physician I've tried my best to bring all my life experiences to the table when taking care of my patients. Some of the most meaningful and impactful moments during residency have been during my time in labor and delivery (L&D). A vast majority of these patients are young, healthy women presenting for normal labor pain and might be the very first time they are in the hospital for any reason at all. Several patients that I've interacted with were very defensive because of either poor past experiences with medical personnel, horror stories from the internet, and/or other physical or mental abuse and trauma. There have been times when I felt the medical staff in general have judged the patient harshly during their care because of something the patient has said or done upon arrival. I try to put myself in the patient's shoes and remember that the patients are doing the best that they can under the circumstances while still trusting in us to provide the best medical care possible.

A recent experience illustrated how we can build connections by being present for patients. There was a young lady who was being "difficult," but after sitting down, talking calmly, and really taking the extra minute or two to connect with her, she really opened up and allowed me to help alleviate her pain. She told me that she was just feeling "pushed around and not heard."

Time and time again I've had these experiences on L&D, and they have really shaped my interactions with these young, laboring patients. It quickly became apparent that these small connections I was making in the beginning of our conversations were going much further than I realized. These connections allowed not only Anesthesia to provide care, but also laid the groundwork to improve all aspects of care, from the obstetrician to the nursing staff. It's adding the human element that really brings this together and makes each and every interaction a purposeful and meaningful experience for me. I hope that I can impart this insight to future medical students, residents, and staff wherever I go to improve obstetrical care and anesthetic care everywhere.

Dr. Covington is finishing his anesthesiology residency and will be staff at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center NorthWest Hospital in Seneca, PA upon graduation.