

A doctor with two patients

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

My wife and I don't normally shower together, but we do go to the doctor together, even though only one of us has to strip off some clothing.

We go to the doctor together but not because the doctor wants to examine and treat us both simultaneously. Most doctors don't care to do that. But my wife and I do care to tag along when either one of us is seeing a doctor.

We do that now because our aging memories tend to slacken right along with much of the rest of our bodies. We first began following each other into the examination room about 20 years ago because of an experience that concerned us.

That was the day I walked into the hospital to get a colonoscopy. Suffice it to say, if you've not yet had the pleasure of a colonoscopy, pay attention. When you're about 50 or so and don't know what a colonoscopy is, it's time you learn. A colonoscopy is a rude but life-saving procedure. It involves peering into where the sun don't shine, letting the doctor and his trusty little camera locate any early signs of possible trouble.

And if nothing else, that disrespectful procedure can reassure you with good news on that subject.

However, I'll admit that on the day I went in for my first colonoscopy, I was disconcerted by what a kind woman on the hospital staff said to me.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you," I said. "I'm here for my colonoscopy."

"Do you have an appointment?" she asked.

I was tempted to answer, "No. I just thought I'd walk in off the street and climb onto the operating table. Or maybe I should use the drive-up window."

But she was such a helpful lady that I decided to behave like an adult for a change.

That was a delightful experience, but it wasn't the reason Sharon and I started trailing each other into our doctor appointments. The real reason was when it was Sharon's turn at a colonoscopy. As they finished with her exam and wheeled her into a recovery room, the doctor came in and gave her a verbal report on how the procedure had gone and how she should deal with the aftermath. .

At least, that's what I heard as I entered the room. Sharon was still too groggy to glean much from what was said. She had been given some version of an amnesia medication used, I assume, to wipe away any unpleasant memories.

Suffice it to say, she couldn't remember hardly anything the doctor was saying as she came through most of the fog she was still experiencing.

Fortunately, I am a writer. I whipped out my trusty pen and note pad.

We did better the next time she went to a doctor. Not only did I sit in on her conversation with the doctor, but she did the same for me in my subsequent visits. That has become standard procedure for us. And it's not because the doctors were inept. Quite the contrary. But there's always a certain amount of twitchy concern when a person goes to a doctor.

Most of all, Sharon and I accompany each other into the examination room, not because we don't trust the doctors, but because we are not quite so quick any more at grasping what the doctor is saying. We both understand only some of what we are being told.

So we take notes for each other as the doctor explains what he has done for our personal parts. And it doesn't hurt a thing that Sharon is a linguist with a grasp on all those big medical words borrowed from Latin and Greek.

When we both come marching in, the occasional doctor grimaces visibly. But more often than not, the doctors we visit seem to appreciate our help in fostering maximum understanding. After all, when somebody is doing something like peering inside the person you married and tries to explain what is happening in there, more often than not, that can be useful - and comforting. For better or for worse, we two and the doctor are a team.

Our role in the healing doesn't pay anything at all, except a continuation of life. But we try not to get too much in the way of the medics for our own good. And I think most of those doctors admire our bedside manner.

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