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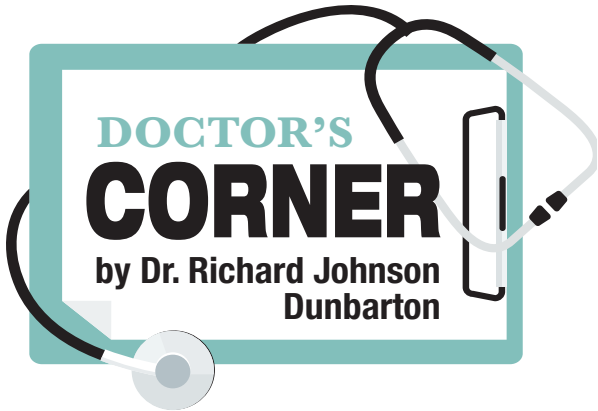







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DOCTOR'S
CORNER
by Dr. Richard Johnson
Dunbarton



LISTEN

When medical students rotated through my office, I gave them the opportunity, with the patient's permission, to speak with the patient before I did. The assignment was to listen to the patient because the patient will tell you what their problem is. Ask questions thoughtfully and listen carefully. When ready the student presented to me their differential diagnosis and together we would again listen to the patient. When we felt that we knew what the patient's issue was, we would then examine the patient to try to affirm our 'working diagnosis.' If needed, we would then discuss what laboratory exams might be helpful in proving the diagnosis or in planning treatment. I wanted the student to understand and experience the art of listening, and it was very rewarding to see their excitement when they understood that they could come to a working diagnosis without the aid of technology.

What a difference from most of our conversation, be it between individuals, governments, or ideologies. Our first move seems to be to state our opinion, which interpreted means our opinion is correct, and any other opinion is therefore incorrect. We so easily forget that our opinion is derived from the place we stand (our own personal history, beliefs, and injuries), and we often do not give the same validity or permission to the other person. No matter the issue, you might say we have therefore become the autocrat that we are supposedly against. This happens because we speak and pronounce (or pontificate) before we ever listen.

There are many ways to define listening. A simple guide is to think of these three: 1. **Competitive Listening.** This is when you are simply listening to find areas of "attack;" areas where you can criticize the speaker and then push your agenda. 2. **Attentive Listening.** Here you show the speaker genuine interest by paying close attention. 3. **Active Listening.** After listening, you then reflect to the speaker what you understood was said; a clearer understanding can thus be achieved. It is important to recognize if you have any negative opinion of the speaker. Are you stereotyping, or do you use selective listening? Ask yourself: Why am I in this conversation? Do I really care about the other person and their perspective, or am I simply trying to assert my position, belief, or rights?


I encourage everyone to read the short book by members of the Harvard Negotiation Project titled *Difficult Conversations*. To entice you, here are three quotes from the book.

“Tomatoes aren't vegetables. And attributions, judgments, and accusations aren't feelings.”

“We assume we know the intentions of others when we don't. Worse still when we are unsure about someone's intentions, we too often decide they are bad.”

“It is the story you tell yourself about what's happening. In any given situation our feelings follow our thoughts.”

Let us all, health care professionals, parents, teachers, kids, civil servants, and government leaders, become better listeners for a better world.



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