

The Importance of Listening in Family Medicine

Doctors in a particular specialty only focus on the specific age group, body part, organ system or disease. Cardiologists focus on the heart and cardiovascular system, a nephrologist specializes in the care and diseases of the kidneys, and pediatricians treat only children.

However, family physicians have the opportunity to treat patients of all ages.

Lauren V. Carruth, MD (Carruth-Mehmert), a Galloway-area family physician, enjoys family medicine because of the long-term aspect

the practice provides. She can see entire families - children, parents, grandparents - and build relationships with each of her patients. Every day she treats patients with a broad spectrum of ailments and illnesses, all with the underlying goal of helping people when they need it, as well as providing preventative primary care to keep people healthy.

After graduating from Ohio Wesleyan University, Dr. Carruth began her quest for a medical degree at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in 1999. In her first two years, she questioned whether family medicine was the right course for her, but during the time she spent in a family medicine office in her third year of medical school, she made her decision.

“I got to see the nursery, pediatrics and the full spectrum of what family medicine included - and I really enjoyed it. The care and the job of a family physician revolves around overall health of an entire person, not just a single organ,” said Dr. Carruth.

After completing her residency, Dr. Carruth worked at a practice located in an area with a high population of patients who lacked financial stability. Most patients needed care for chronic conditions and she worked hard to help them get healthier.

One patient that left a lasting impression was an older gentleman in his late 70s who was essentially homeless and lacked the social support needed to take care of his health. Dr. Carruth and her staff treated him and also worked to help him get the appropriate housing, avoiding nursing homes, at the patient’s request. Just as the patient was on the verge of getting housing, he fainted from dehydration and ended up back in the care of Dr. Carruth.

During the patient’s hospitalization Dr. Carruth found he had heart disease and recommended open heart surgery. However, the surgery would likely have ultimately cost him his independence which he valued above all else. Therefore, the patient strongly decided that he didn’t want to have the surgery. Dr. Carruth and her staff advocated for him to go home with close outpatient follow up. For nearly two years, the gentleman was entirely independent and no longer homeless. He passed away in 2014 in his sleep, the way he wanted.

“Sometimes, treating a patient doesn’t just mean prescribing medicine,” says Dr. Carruth. “Sometimes it’s just knowing the patient’s wishes and being an advocate for what they want. In this case, that’s how I treated the patient.”

In her time in practice, Dr. Carruth has learned a very important lesson.

“It’s the little things. A lot of the time patients are scared because they don’t know medical terminology or what to expect - listening really goes a long way,” she says. “I’ve heard many patients say ‘I appreciated you just listening and explaining things to me.’ It helps them feel more confident and engaged about their medical decisions and their overall health.” ▲



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