

Virtual Mentor

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PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Through the Patient's Eyes: On Being Human

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What is it like to be a patient, experiencing a debilitating, potentially life-threatening illness or encountering the health care environment, perhaps for the first time, from a position of vulnerability? Through the stories of patients, physicians come to see themselves, and most especially their communications, from the other side of the equation. When patients—and that includes physicians who become patients—voice their most intimate thoughts, feelings, and reactions, much can be learned.

To arrive at the place where respectful, trusting, open, and truly informed patient-physician communications can take place, one begins by giving the patient undivided, close attention, listening for what is said as well as unsaid. To cultivate this habit of closely attending to another requires practice in listening and interpreting the language, voice, and intonations of others' speech. Through such conscious exercise, each of us also becomes more aware of our own speech affect. Every month, we will present narrated stories from the *JAMA* column *A Piece of My Mind* because spoken words reveal much about the relationship between patient and physician.

November Patient Story

Dimeo NA. On being human. *JAMA*. 1998;208(13):1135.

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