



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Where's the Love?

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

So there you are in your urgent care center, with a full waiting room of cranky, impatient people who don't feel good—kids with head lacerations, teenagers with stomach flu, businesspeople with scratchy throats and body aches, senior citizens feeling weak and dizzy—plus accompanying parents, friends, spouses, children, caretakers...

And no sooner do you get finished taking care of them, bringing all of the skills and talents of your center's staff to bear, that they head right back out your door to get on with their lives.

Where's the love?

They don't see what the insider sees. They don't see the sleepless nights you spent when the center was just getting started, wondering how you were going to make the payroll.

They don't see the hours of glad-handing and hallway politics you had to grit your teeth through just to keep your center in the health system's good graces.

They don't see the agonizing you have done over new hires, nor the time spent training, developing and coaching the physicians or staff.

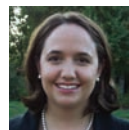
They don't see the countless reports, contracts, filings, forms, negotiations, trade-offs...they don't see the effort it takes to provide them with the "simple" opportunity to get safe, affordable, quality care without an appointment.

When it comes to "getting the love" it is a two-way street. It's just not necessarily the street we believe it should be.

In healthcare, it is very, very important to get everything right. That's the price of admission and you pay it every day.

But the question here is how you get paid back. If you have been looking to get paid back for all those things that patients don't see, stop looking. That's not where it's at.

As humans—and this includes patients—we respond to things that move us: consideration, respect, compassion, and genuine interest in us as individuals.



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There's a great insurance ad on television that reminds us that the other drivers on the road are not just a car in our way; they are people.

It should be the same way with the patients who visit your practice. They don't think of themselves as patients, but as sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, office managers, teachers, prom queens, and doting grandmothers.

Keep that in mind when you feel a question like, "Are you the mother?" or "Are you the husband?" forming in your mouth. "The mother" is not a generic person. She is *this specific child's* mother, and she is probably tired and worried. She may also be furious at her son for climbing the tree when she told him not to, or stressed out over a presentation at work, or in an abusive situation at home. Or, her life may be perfect except for this small inconvenience.

The right word or sentence—or better yet, some good listening skills—can help you and your staff best understand what this patient situation needs. And it's probably not just stitches or a prescription. Any competent clinician can sew up a cut and quickly get a patient out the door, but to have a meaningful encounter, even if it's quick...that is where it's at. That's where everyone gets a payoff.

There's no mystery here. You get what you give. Give a little of yourself and you'll get a little for yourself. That's where "the love" is; the forms and paperwork and processes are all just necessary props in the grand drama of helping others.

And lest you think this is just a "feel-good" message, let me also remind you of this: it's not sutures and prescriptions that will get people to come back, send their friends, and talk up your center all over town. It's the literal *care* they receive.

That mother tells her fellow playgroup mothers, the businessperson tells his colleagues, the older couple tells their ballroom dancing class, and the teenager...well, let's not push it.

I hope that you all are able to "get some love" in your centers. And don't forget that it applies to your coworkers and employees, as well.

Then, if you still aren't feeling it, call us any time or come see us at the convention in New Orleans in April and we'll give it to you. As long as you give it back. ■