

## The waiting

**A**s a pathologically goal-oriented person, I find long waits in line are usually a teeth-gnashing, expletive-mumbling endurance test, but a recent 2-hour period of standing (more like fidgety dancing) in an interminably slow lineup at the passport office offered me time to reflect on one facet of our current health care crisis. After the first 30 minutes of what I now suspect was very annoying behavior for my fellow queue-ers, I began to wonder if it was just me or whether doctors as a group don't wait very well. Then my superego kicked in and conveniently validated my premise that *most docs* don't wait very well.

For the most part, doctors are rushing to get to the next patient, the next hospital, the next night without call, and, most importantly, the next vacation. But this inability to tolerate anything but minute wait times is a bit of

a paradox as, for the most part, we seem prepared to tolerate criminally long wait times for our patients without doing much about them beyond some regular grumbling and grouching to patients, colleagues, cocktail party acquaintances, and the next-door neighbor. However, most of us would not tolerate having to wait for access to medical care for ourselves, our family members, or our close friends.

I wonder why more doctors are not speaking out about how far too many of our patients have to wait for definitive care. In many instances, these long, cruel waits are thrust upon our most vulnerable citizens at the expense of whatever remaining health reserves they possess and, in some (often highly publicized) instances, their lives.

If there is evidence that a complementary, parallel system of private insurance works in virtually every political system in which it has been

tried, why aren't more of us demanding that our association representatives, MLAs, and MPs engage in a proper public dialogue, free from political ideology?

On the other hand, perhaps as a nation we are so accustomed to waiting that the actual physical act of waiting doesn't stir the kind of collective public anger that in many countries has forced legislators to overhaul their own previously dysfunctional health care systems with success. However, as citizens and physicians, we should not be prepared to accept that without reasonable access to care, many of our patients have to wait with eager anticipation for their own demise in order to finally be free from pain and disability.

—JAW



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