

Tables turned

As a result of a recent cycling accident, I found myself, suddenly and unexpectedly, thrown (literally as well as figuratively) into the role of patient. Lying on the hard concrete of one of Vancouver's bike paths I was first aided by a young couple in-line skating in the opposite direction. Their response was kind, calm, and practical—reassuring to know that there are true good Samaritans out there. They called 911 and I quickly became very appreciative of the skills, compassion, and professionalism of a group of paramedics. Unless one works in the emergency room, I think many of us in the medical profession take these colleagues for granted rather like the ambulances they drive; we appreciate them in the abstract. For myself the reality of a dislocated shoulder and fractured wrist made my appreciation much more concrete (sorry about that!). I also have a

feeling that my increased appreciation will not fade with time.

The next group of colleagues with whom I interacted on a new level was the staff of the emergency room—docs, nurses, X-ray techs, and, of course, an orthopaedic surgeon. Again, I was struck by the kindness and professionalism with which their care was delivered. As has been said before, it is the little things that count as well, like getting my wedding ring off before the swelling got too bad and safely delivering it into the hands of my husband. Having X-rays taken with injuries like this is no picnic, but a simple apology for increasing the pain, albeit out of necessity, is another little thing that counts.

I am now at home, humerus relocated and wrist internally fixated—and mind frustrated. Coping without the function of either upper limb has taught me new lessons in patience and

humility. I cannot remember the last time I experienced a thrill over brushing my own teeth and being able to feed myself with a spoon. And I'm getting better! How do our patients with disabilities, many of them far worse than my temporary ones, cope for years and yet stay cheerful and optimistic? Perhaps it is a skill you learn with practice. Fortunately (unfortunately?) most of us never get to practise this skill.

When I return to work it will be with joy over seeing my patients and colleagues once more, but the joy will be accompanied by a much deeper appreciation for the courage and determination so many of our patients exhibit, often over years of illness and disability. I'll also be back on my bicycle but with increased caution around railway tracks!

—LML

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