

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Wolff is a board-certified family physician in private practice in Cornelius, North Carolina. He finished his family practice residency in 1997. He has graciously consented to share stories from the trenches of primary care. While his practice diary is taken from actual patient encounters, the reader should be aware that some medication references may represent off-label uses. Identifying details have been changed to protect patient confidentiality.

We at the *Companion* are certain that these vignettes will inform, entertain, challenge, and stimulate our readers in their effort to address behavioral issues in the everyday practice of medicine.

Like Daughter, Like Mother

Christian G. Wolff, M.D.

Monday

When PW first came to see me, I had that inner groan that we get from time to time. This personable 25-year-old secretary had just moved to North Carolina from south Florida to get away from hurricane threats, and she needed a refill for her butalbital, which she took every day.

To my delight, she didn't like butalbital, so when I suggested a different tack to managing her headaches, she was open to my ideas. So we decided to switch to daily valproate. She returns today brimming with a smile, noting that she feels better than she has since high school. I guess that reinforces my feeling that we all deserve the benefit of the doubt.

Tuesday

CL is a dour fellow who has been unhappy with the world since I've known him. So you can imagine my concern when he presented me with the request for a concealed gun permit. Apparently, he had recently been hospitalized (unbeknown to me) for depression, and the state required a physician to sign off on his permit.

Now, first of all, I had been managing his lipids only—he had not shared with me that he had been seeing a psychiatrist. Second, I asked him why he didn't ask his psychiatrist to sign the form. After hemming and hawing, he conceded that his shrink had turned down his request.

Yet he persisted in telling me that I should clear him and was miffed at my rebuff. Today I received a records release request from a new doctor. I hope the new doctor reads the last note in the chart.

Wednesday

I have been taking care of RE since the first year of my practice. She is a good-hearted soul with a difficult combination of bipolar and seizure disorders. She has had many ups and downs. I've helped her through her pregnancy and assisted as she has battled fibromyalgia, as well. She lives in the "rough" part of Charlotte, but drives the twenty miles out to see me at my office because I took care of her when other docs gave her short shrift. She has had more than her share of bad luck. I was floored when she revealed to me today that she had been raped on her back porch by a neighbor.

Her affect was stonelike. She wasn't sleeping, she told me, and she was worried that she was at risk for slipping into mania. After reviewing her forensic gynecologic record from the hospital on my PDA, I performed the prescribed follow-up examination and then sat with her for a while. I'm not sure exactly what I said, if I said much at all. I prescribed some zolpidem to help her sleep, and I'll see her again next week.

Thursday

When PW, whose migraines I treated, moved to North Carolina, her mother had come as well. Today, PW's mom came in asking for the same "miracle drug" that I had prescribed for her daughter. Not only were the daughter's migraines gone, but her moods were suddenly even-keeled. Hmm . . .

Friday

KB and his wife HB were in last week. They had been having a tough time with their son—despite intervention with counselors over the last 4 years, he continued to defy them. He used various illicit drugs, quit school, and left the house. A few weeks ago, his parents were called by some of his friends. Apparently, NB had been living under a bridge and was desperate. His parents decided to

reach out to him and have asked me to see him for a wellness examination.

During our visit today, the first time I have seen the son as a patient, it struck me that he related symptoms of flight of ideas, insomnia, episodic grandiosity, and risky behavior. I gave him a mood disorder questionnaire, and when I returned to the examination room, he was in tears. We'll try a mood stabilizer, and I'll see him next week. ♦