

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.

Rolling Rocks

Christian G. Wolff, M.D.

Monday

FD is one of my challenge patients. This 57-year-old woman has multiple medical problems in addition to the bipolar disorder that was diagnosed years ago, but her status as a patient on Medicaid makes it nearly impossible for her to see a psychiatrist. She does fairly well until she inevitably feels like she doesn't need her medicine anymore. Today she returns, and, before I enter the room, I scan her chart. Today's chief complaint is fatigue, and her medication list is notable for its absence of any psychotropic medication. With that, I assume my role of Sisyphus...

Tuesday

GT is a really good kid in for a follow-up of his cholesterol. Blessed with an inheritance of excessive low-density lipoproteins, this 21-year-old college junior had taken it upon himself to forge a different path from his parents in regard to diet and exercise. A pudgy high schooler, he has morphed into an active, lanky young man. His LDL level fell from 195 to 75! Asked about his success, he told me he biked daily and changed to a vegetarian diet. His diet lasted, at least, until about a month ago when he began to have "dreams of breakfast meats." Bacon, sausage, even livermush (a delicacy in the Carolinas). His affliction was resolved with some tidbits of pork. The dreams have ceased. Now, that's a prescription with potential for abuse; but he promises to use it sparingly.

I've heard that one before—more than once, I'll tell you. More than once.

Wednesday

DW is having a really hard time. I recently diagnosed her husband of fifty years with end-stage lung cancer and placed him into hospice care. An anxious woman even in good times, she has finally settled down with a combination of alprazolam and metoprolol. Today I received a phone call from her daughter-in-law with a word of thanks. "Mom can be challenging," she says, "but your listening to her problems seems to have helped her more than almost anything."

I still think it was the drugs, but her words were kind.

Thursday

Immunization anxiety is nothing unusual; after all, I flinched a little when I received my tetanus update a couple of weeks ago. What I do find somewhat entertaining are some of the reports of widespread syncope associated with human papilloma virus vaccine. While the blogosphere distorts the extent of the problem, I still wonder why there is at least a perception that the syncopal episodes occur more often than with, say, meningococcal vaccine? The power of suggestion?

Friday

PT is a new patient. Her last doctor, she says, was "hell bent" on having her discontinue the fluoxetine she had been taking for the last 10 years. PT claims no side effects, denies any stigmata of mania, and is scared witless that her depression may return once she discontinues the drug. Besides, she says, "at Target I can get 90 tablets for less than a 12-pack of Rolling Rock."

I can't comprehend how her prior physician wasn't swayed by that argument. ♦