The New Doctor

January 10, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

Today was my first visit to a new medical provider. My usual doctor had left awhile ago and the new one that took his place I just never connected with. Maybe it was him and his bedside manner which was different from my previous doctor that I found disarming. Maybe it was me. Maybe I expected him to be like my previous doctor and so my expectations were set unreasonably high. It was turning out to be a bad relationship where I eventually said to him the infamous break up line, “It’s Not You, it’s Me”. And like that a clinic that I have been visiting for the last ten years of my status, I was no longer a patient. Whatever the reason I knew that I had to make a change as I just wasn’t connecting with him.

In my look for another doctor I quickly discovered it was going to be about the same difficulty as looking to find someone to be in a committed relationship in New York City. I used the dating comparison as searching for a new doctor is akin to looking for a new relationship. For example you want to make sure that you find someone that you’re comfortable and compatible with. Of course you’re not going to bed with that person but until the union end this person will know every intimate detail about you. They literally will see your scars and all as you both work on making yourself as healthy as you can. You won’t whisper sweet nothings but you will, hopefully, be sharing private and sometimes embarrassing ailments, things you don’t even share with yourself. Since it involves your health of course you want to make sure you feel comfortable as proper health advice can not be dispensed with half information.

I thought my search was going to be as simple as Googling, “who is a good HIV doctor” and figuring the first one that popped up was going to be the best because Google always put the best search result at the top right? I was proven wrong as going through the results was now becoming complicated as I discovered many medical providers had limited hours and saw clients only on a particular day of the week. Some made you go through endless electronically phone prompts just to get to the receptionist and sometimes when you finally got to the receptionist you knew that person could benefit in Customer service 101, 102 and 103. Some didn’t accept my insurance or were based in locations that would be to difficult to get to without using a passport.

In my circumstances I was in a unique position denied to others based on the health care system in this country. Being insured I had a choice between a clinic and a private doctor. Both I feel have their benefits as well as drawbacks. Coming from a clinic setting where everything you need is under one roof, I felt that maybe at my stage I would be ready for a private. The clinic I had been attending suddenly seemed to change on me. Where before you felt the doctor was giving you the time you needed, it now felt as if I were on a conveyor belt and the clinic’s mission was less about the patients and more about how many they could get through the door in order to bill. The nurses that used to be so jovial and seemed to like their job now looked stressed as they

tried to keep up with the pace. You know something is wrong when you're coming for medical services and on each visit the nurses while waiting for the doctor uses your visit as a therapy session for themselves. Thinking to myself, who do I send my bill to?

There were some moments when I thought I had found a new provider only to again not have that moment of connect. I even wondered why they don't have the ten minute dating routine with a room full of doctors so you can quickly find out who you'll relate to as you move down the row of tables and make quick introductions. Maybe I'm onto a great new idea!

After several hit and misses I accessed my situation and figured since I was feeling well I didn't need a provider. That as long as my old doctor would give me refills I could just manage my own care. And it was easy to get refills from the old clinic as it never dawned on them that I had moved on so getting refills was simply a matter of going online and filling out the form. The growing disconnects between doctor and patient became as evident as the introduction of the new technology was similar to how people have started to relate on Facebook. Why interact with you in person when we can do it on Facebook? Isn't online wonderful? What I was doing though wasn't such a good thing and although managing my own health saved me time, I was also setting myself up.

Because I had been a person with who rarely got sick if ever, I found comfort in the fact that I didn't need to share with a doctor. I never stopped to connect the dots that the reason I was feeling so well was because I did have a relationship with a doctor. My visits were not simply a time to just chat with the doctor but also we were being preventive and going after things that looked like it would be a problem down the line. How you look at a doctor is so crucial to health especially if you walk in telling yourself you're being proactive rather than reactive. For a lot of us we're in that reactive stage where we're waiting for something to feel wrong but by then it may be too late or options of treatment are lessened because a visit was delayed.

This New Year I finally found a doctor I felt comfortable with. He was someone who listened and didn't look down at their watch. It felt reassuring to know that I wasn't going to play around with my health and doing research makes a difference as not all doctors come from the same cloth. And another thing that one has to look at is the receptionist area and how they treat you and make you feel. I can't tell you how many good doctors I probably would have been a patient of if only they didn't have an unskilled or overworked receptionist area. It makes a difference.

So hello new doctor and I know we're in the honeymoon phase but you complete me as I now have all the needed elements to manage my HIV. Here's to the first date and for many more to come.

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