

A Little Bit of Perspective

Christian G. Wolff, M.D.

Monday

AG is a 38-year-old C-5 quadriplegic man whom I have been seeing for a few years now. He was injured 15 years ago as a witness to a robbery and has since done reasonably well with a surprising level of self-sufficiency. He works as a technical consultant for a big corporation downtown, and he always seems to be planning his next move. I was markedly concerned, therefore, when I received his message that his “nerves” were getting to him.

He related to me that he had become significantly anxious and depressed because of his son's recent graduation from high school. Apparently AG had been using as motivation the upbringing of his son, and, now that his son is moving out to college, AG worries that he no longer has anything to live for.

This was one of those visits where I had to struggle to maintain a professional ear—his story was so compelling. What can one say to this man without being trite?

Tuesday

I was looking forward to seeing DT in follow-up today. DT is a 31-year-old mother of 2 young children who moved to the area recently. She had come to see me a month ago to ask “if there was anything new” to treat her depression. Her prior physician had, over 4 years, treated her with 5—count 'em, 5—different antidepressants until finally achieving success with sertraline. At its effective dose, unfortunately, it wipes out any trace of libido, and she has been anorgasmic now for 3 years. She has had trials of various non-SSRIs without success.

Why was I looking forward to her return visit? Because at a recent CME I heard a lecture recommending augmenting with buspirone in cases exactly like hers. And guess what? It worked!

Wednesday

DR is a chronically dysthymic, obese, diabetic woman. Or should I say, she *was*. After numerous visits during which she had reported trying the latest fad diets of various sorts—without my blessing—she came in today for her 3-month follow-up . . . 20 pounds lighter! She was beaming ear to ear. I had never seen her so bright. Her secret? She eats less and now attends Tae-Bo classes 3 days a week while walking on her off days.

Not only is she 20 pounds lighter, she's sleeping better and feeling great, and her glycosylated hemoglobin fell a whopping point and a half. She attributes her improvement to my standing firm against the fad diets, which, she says, made the point of a healthy lifestyle finally sink in.

So take heart, fellow physicians! Eventually *someone* will heed our advice.

Thursday

I received a note in the mail today from a physician who apparently is tired of reading my complaints about antidepressant discontinuation syndromes associated with venlafaxine. He prescribes 2 daily doses of fluoxetine at 20 mg at the end of a venlafaxine taper. Apparently the long half-life of the fluoxetine does the trick. I asked my local venlafaxine representative, who confirmed that many psychiatrists have used this strategy. I promise not to write about this topic anymore.

Friday

Yesterday, our female partner delivered her first child, a healthy baby boy. This much-anticipated event occurred during the 41st week of her pregnancy, and her consternation was beginning to show. A very busy and efficient physician in the practice, she suddenly found herself sitting at home doing nothing for a week and a half, just waiting to deliver her child while her maternity leave ticked away. Our senior partner, who had prolific obstetrical experience before coming to this practice, observed that God has wonderful ways of reminding us that "it's not all about us" and that life just can't always be scheduled. I'm looking forward to the day that I can make eloquent observations like that.

Editor's note: Dr. Wolff is a board-certified family physician in private practice in Huntersville/Davidson, 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. 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.