

Please - treat me like a dog

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If you are in need of emergency medical care, you might be better off being a person in a fur suit than a human. Consider the following:

Recently while working in his office my friend Tom felt dizzy, couldn't walk a straight line and suffered blurred vision. He called 911 and was transported to the emergency room of a local hospital. After being in the emergency room fifteen long hours he was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. After questioning this scary news, he was told he didn't need intensive care but there were no beds in the general wards. It is a good thing he didn't need intensive care because even though a regular diet was approved by his doctor, not even basic care needs like a glass of water or something to eat were met.

Instead of providing any care, the staff focused on high technology tests. While the tests are essential shouldn't healers be at least a little concerned about basics like dehydration?

Tests were done all night and as anyone who has ever been in the hospital knows, sleep was out of the question. The paradox of the "care" given was that Tom didn't have intravenous liquid because he wasn't an ICU patient yet he had no liquid for 36 hours because he was in ICU and confined to bed hooked up to various standard ICU monitors which presumably, he didn't even need!

About 4am Tom demanded water and a nurse went ballistic on my incredulous friend and started screaming about how tough her job is and how she resents having non ICU patients placed in the ICU. Exhausted, hungry and dehydrated, the patient had to become Dr. Phil and take care of the care taker.

After two days of very uncomfortable time in the hospital, the doctors sent him home with instructions to come in one a month for follow up with another round of tests. Certainly the tests are important and potentially life saving but are healthcare providers so focused on technology that they forget about the human in front of them?

Contrast that with the experience of my Jack Russell terrier, Benny Sue. On Sunday of the Memorial Day weekend, Benny characteristically got overzealous while playing ball. While doing a spectacular catch

in midair, she came down and caught her toenail between two bricks. If you've ever lost a nail you know how painful it is. Benny's nail was still on but twisted and her twelve pound frame shook with pain.

We rushed her to the 24 hour doggie emergency room at Valley Animal Hospital in Tucson Arizona. There were other four leggeds in the waiting room but after five minutes we were seeing Dr. Moffett, a pleasant competent woman who told us what tests she would need to do and what was needed to take care of our beloved pet, spoke reassuringly to Benny and took her right in. Within 30 minutes a bandaged puppy returned - calm and cared for. She had a treat and a drink of water. Dr. Moffett brought Benny to us herself and explained what Benny needed to recover. We gladly paid the after-hours-weekend-holiday fee and felt it was a bargain.

The best practices evident at Valley Animal Hospital

- 1. Reassure the family
- 2. Explain what needs to happen
- 3. Don't confuse technology and tests with humane care
- 4. Try to make the patient comfortable
- 5. Assist patient with basic needs
- 6. Talk respectfully to concerned patients and family

My friend Tom's physical problem is a lot more complicated than my dog's toenail. Also, the animal emergency room wasn't flooded with people using emergency as primary care. Dr. Moffett wasn't overwhelmed nor was her helper. That the medical field has enormous challenges is without question. Still, when a dog gets more humane care than a human being, something is missing in the Best Practices of the medical establishment. At least consider giving the patient a pat on the head, a dried out cookie and something to drink.

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