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Relating to Others with Dignity and Respect

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Your Life Your Health

The Examiner

January 4, 2007

One of the most difficult things we do in our lives is determining how we are going to relate to others. Today's column consists of two notes which I sent to SETMA's staff about how we should relate to one another and to those who seek healthcare at SETMA. The one immediately below was sent on December 15, 2006 and addresses seeing colleagues and clients as their children see them. The second one below was sent May 22, 2003, and addresses seeing others as if they were our own grandchildren.

As you read these, apply them to your own life and circumstance. Health issues often originate in the stress caused by relationships. Following the principles discussed here can relieve a great deal of stress and can create health both mental and physical.

December 15, 2006 Note to SETMA's Staff

As the Christmas season is upon us, this note originally sent to you May 22, 2003, seems appropriate to review. Each person we see and/or work with at SETMA is special to someone. As I relate to others each day, I now try to see them through the eyes of others and to think of them as others think of them.

One case in point is the nurse who meets me at the hospital each morning. I personally see him as a young man who is very bright and very good at what he does. As I listen to him talk about his family and as I hear his plans for the future, I realize that to his four children he is not a junior member of a healthcare team; he is a father. **There are four children who see him as I saw my father and who think of him as I thought of my father.** That realization has radically changed my goals for this young man's experience at SETMA. He is no longer an employee but he is a person whose future and well being have become a personal concern to me.

Since my father's death, I have thought of him at each stage of his life. I realized how courageous he was in facing life at the same age as this young man. I realize how my father protected me, provided for me, planned for me, sacrificed for me, and then I realize that my nurse is doing the same thing for his children and wife. I realize that while the young man is showing up for work and performing task each day, that he is acting out a much greater role on a much larger stage. My responsibility is to help him be successful not only in his role at SETMA but in his role as a father, a husband, as the hero in the story of his own life and in the lives of those who love him and see him much differently than as an employee.

It changes our perception of others as we see them as their children, their spouses, their

parents, their loved ones see them. **Recognize that everyone who works with SETMA and everyone who presents themselves for care at SETMA are an important and critical part of the matrix of life in their circle of influence. And, for those whose social isolation is such that they are not part of such a community of family, or of faith, or of friends, it is all the more important that SETMA become a safe haven where they are respected, cared for and treated with dignity and excellence.**

Today, as you interact with your colleagues and associates, as you interact with SETMA's patients, see them as parents, as children, as family. See them as you see the person you most admire and respect. And, when you do that, **you will discover the energy and the excitement and the enthusiasm to serve, to support and to encourage them as you have never known nor felt before.**

Re-read the note below. Recommit to the vision and the passion we have always had for benefiting others. And, as do that, let me wish you a very Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year, for with your renewed vision and passion for SETMA's mission you will find both.

May 22, 2003 Note to SETMA's Staff

Yesterday, an incident occurred which re-focused for me a commitment which I made many years ago. It is a commitment which is at the core of SETMA's philosophy and it is a commitment which requires renewal from time to time.

Four of my Grandchildren have been very sick for 10 days with high fever, recurrent episodes, nausea, vomiting, muscle aches and pains. On Tuesday, when I saw two of them, I almost wept. They were so drawn and sickly looking. The third-born of my daughter's children looked like she had lost more than 10% of her body weight. I was worried. I held them both and prayed for them and then told my daughter to bring them to the clinic on Wednesday. She did.

Through a series of events an error was made and tests were not completed. That's understandable and I accepted it. I asked however that the tests be performed anyway and was told that the specimens had been discarded. At this point my worry and anxiety turned to fury. As I struggled with a response to those in my office reporting this matter, I simply said, "Get out of my office!" As they left, I said, "You are dealing with the most precious things in my life."

Later, I was called and told that the samples were not discarded but simply placed for discarding. The specimens were processed and the results were reported. Because of knowing the children, it was easy for me to know which results were for which child and they it turned out that the tests were assigned to the right child. As I thanked one of those who had previously been in my office, I shared the following feelings, ideas and thoughts.

My anger had nothing to do with the individuals involved, or even with the events. My anger was an expression of the depth of my worry about those I love more than my own life. Love is painful; it is costly. If your love for another has never caused you pain, you have never loved.

When a patient, family or parent is expressing anger toward us as healthcare providers, we must remember that most often they are not angry with us. They don't dislike us. They are worried and afraid.

Worry and fear are often expressed in terms of anger. Anger expresses our sense of desperation and our sense of the loss of control. If we look beyond a person's anger to their worry and fear, we can empathize with them, whether patient, family or parent, and we can share the burden brought by their fear and worry. In this way, we can turn their anger into constructive efforts for their loved one's benefit.

Fifteen years ago, a grandmother walked into my office and said in tears, "Can you help me?" I told her that I would try. She related that her daughter was pregnant. Her daughter had Type I diabetes mellitus and consistently refused proper control of her illness. The grandmother told me that all of her daughter's doctors wanted to abort the baby and that neither she nor her daughter wanted to terminate the pregnancy.

I agreed to care for the mother during her pregnancy and to help find a physician to delivery the baby. When the child was born, he had multiple birth defects and required a permanent tracheotomy because of tracheal atresia. Mrs. Holly and I had other friends whose children were absolutely beautiful. We were very close to them and loved and admired their children greatly.

When I first held the child of this diabetic mother, he was three months old. With every breath he spewed mucous everywhere. He was precious but he was not beautiful. As I held him, tears flowed down my cheeks for the Lord spoke to me in my heart and said, "If you cannot and if you do not love this child as you love (the lovely children of our other friends), you can never say that you are pro-life."

I have watched this little boy grow and bring joy and delight to his family. I watched him start to talk. I watched him exert his control over his little world. I watched him begin to learn. I have loved him, as I love the children of our other friends and in some ways more for his needs are greater.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to renew my commitment to loving all children as I love my grandchildren. I told our staff, I want every child who comes into this practice, indeed every person, to be treated as if they are our grandchild. I want everyone no matter and without regard to their circumstances, to be treated with the dignity, respect and excellence which all of our patients – which indeed, all of God's creation – deserve. **Once a person is accepted as a patient with Southeast Texas Medical Associates, LLP, they become a treasure to us and we should treat them in a manner which their innate worth demands.**

In the New Testament, James, who was the half brother of Jesus Christ, said, "If you have respect to a person then you are guilty of the whole law." In modern language he said, "If you think you are better than someone else, or if you think someone else is better than you, or if you use another person for your benefit without regard to their welfare," then you are guilty of the whole law. This means that if you are a respecter of persons, deferring to the

rich and to the powerful for your own gain and mistreating, neglecting or ignoring the poor who can do nothing for you, then you are guilty of the same law which convicts men and women of murder, thief and blasphemy.

When my first grandchild was two years old, he was sick. I went to the grocery store to buy fruit juice for him. As any normal person would, I bought two cans of every kind of fruit juice the store sold. As I stood in the check-out line, the young woman in front of me asked why I had a cart filled with fruit juices. I told her that my grandson was sick and that the juice was for him. She spontaneously began to weep and said through her sobs, "I wish my father would buy something for my children."

We never know what heartache, stress, pain or problems others are facing. And, most of the time, others successfully mask their plight out of a misguided sense of strength or pride. We can't solve all the problems others have, but we can give them a bright spot of being received, respected and valued while they are in our offices or in our care. Don't ever forget, you may be the only ray of hope another person has.

When you are tempted to respond in anger to someone's irritation, frustration or abuse, remember, they are not angry at you. They are angry at the uncontrollable events which confront them. Deal with them as if they were you! And, in doing so, you will fulfill the "law of love," "doing unto others as you would life for them to do unto you."

One of my grandchildren slept with Mrs. Holly and me last night. During the night, her fever raged. I am confident all of them will recover, but for many years I will remember the lesson of which I was reminded yesterday. It is a lesson which we sang of as a child, "red and yellow, black and white," they – all of the little children, even after they have grown up – are precious in His sight. And, so they should be in ours.

Today, lighten someone's load with a smile and with a kind word. You may save a life or you may simply save your own. Certainly, in doing so, you will renew and fulfill the commitment we all made when SETMA was founded. And, remember, if they are a SETMA patient, they are special and deserve special care.