



The importance of compassion in a medical physiatry practice

Danielle Aufiero

Abstract: When health care providers deliver help with empathy, patients feel validated and some will express immense appreciation. This can create a positive feedback loop where intimacy and trust are deepened and reinforced in the doctor-patient relationship, which is known to have a positive impact on therapeutic outcomes.

Indexing Terms: chiropractic; physiatry; compassion; patient-focussed care.

A call for kindness in patient encounters

Most patients who are experiencing upsetting symptoms are looking for a plan of action as much as a sense of relief and compassion.

Approaching patients from a calm, understanding perspective creates an openness that promotes authentic exchanges where patients feel seen and heard.

This creates an alliance between the patient and doctor and can have a significant impact on the patient's state of mind and body regarding treatment responsiveness. A sense of unity behind troubling situations lifts the spirit almost universally.

It's hard enough to be going through unsettling or scary symptoms; soothing patients' fears are part of the solution and addresses a different aspect of healing along the emotional-physical axis. This is an optimal environment that healthcare providers can initiate by consciously choosing to be more present and connect with the essence of who's sitting in front of them. The patient will feel more valued and understood while physicians can experience a deeper sense of purpose beyond its conceptual meaning.

Empathy and compassion in the patient doctor clinical experience

When patients go to the doctor, they are seeking help.

When health care providers deliver that help with empathy, patients feel validated and some will express immense appreciation. This can create a positive feedback loop where intimacy and trust are

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During the pandemic and civil/social unrest, depression and anxiety were more prominent and global amongst people, which compromised their coping mechanisms and flexibility when faced with challenging situations with their bodies.

Practicing medicine mindfully by taking these factors into consideration had an even greater impact than usual during this time period. What the patients reflected back to me was a palpable sense of gratitude touched with optimism. This renders a more fulfilling encounter for all involved.

A woman presented to me with years worth of chronic undiagnosed neck, shoulder and arm pain on her dominant side that was affecting her function. By creating a safe space for her to share intense life traumas and trust me with her emotions, it became apparent that there was a strong emotional component as well as the repetitive physical traumas that she had described on her patient intake form.

Explaining the science and providing clarity in how the physical and emotional traumas became interwoven was the key. Recognising her need to truly understand this connection was only possible through a compassionate lens, and it allowed me to determine the ideal treatment program that would address all aspects of her pain and ultimately lead to symptom resolution.

Danielle Aufiero

MD

Los Angeles CA

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About

Dr. Danielle Aufiero is a sports medicine and physiatry specialist who is primarily focused on reducing pain and restoring function for her patients. She specialises in regenerative treatment approaches, and is particularly interested in bone marrow cell therapy, platelet-rich plasma therapy, Microfragmented Adipose Therapy, image-guided prolotherapy and fluoroscopic and ultrasound guided spine injections.

After graduating from St. Georges University School of Medicine, Dr. Aufiero completed her residency at Kessler Institute of Medicine and Dentistry. She then went on to finish a rigorous two-year spine program at the Robb Pain Management Group in Los Angeles, before working as a sports medicine and physiatry specialist in a variety of clinical settings, including orthopedic, pain management and physical therapy centers.

