

Transcript Details

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Finding Gratitude in the Times of Pandemic

Dr. Greenberg:

Coming to you from the ReachMD studios, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. I'm Dr. Michael Greenberg and just wanted to talk for a minute about something that happened that might not have happened except for the COVID crisis.

I've been in practice for 42 years, and the other day, I got a tip from a patient. I mean a monetary tip. Throughout the years, I've gotten chocolates, I've gotten doughnuts, I've gotten cookies, I've gotten all kinds of gifts, but no one's ever left me a tip. What happened was a young man called that morning, and I've had my office open ever since the COVID crisis started. On a daily basis, I've been keeping people out of the emergency room and helping people with their peace of mind for things that come up acutely and suddenly. I'm doing a lot of telemedicine, but also live visits.

This young man called and said that he had a terribly painful infection, which he did. On the side of his cheek, he had a miserably infected cyst, which I proceeded to drain for him much to his relief. He had no insurance and so he intended on paying cash for the visit. A young guy, not working, and he paid the bill gladly. Telling me how he appreciated the fact that I was there today, that he didn't have to go to the emergency room, that he could get taken care of right away. And then he took a \$20 bill out of his wallet and stuck it in my pocket. I protested vehemently, saying I really don't need this. It seems wrong for a doctor to accept a tip. But it started to make me think about a few things.

The first thing I thought about was how our patients really appreciate us and what we do for them. Those of us who have open offices and are seeing patients and those of us who are home doing telemedicine. Our patients love us and need us. And then I started to think about how grateful I am that I'm a physician. I get to go to work and help people or stay home on the phone and help people. And answer their fears, and a lot of our COVID fears are being projected onto our illnesses these days. And I thought about the gratitude that I have after 42 years. So many of my patients feel more like parts of my family than they do strangers that see me. My patients have been asking me lately, since I reached the ripe age of 71, did I have any intention of retiring. And my answer is the same to all of them. I have none whatsoever and here's why.

Number one, I feel privileged to be a doctor. Yeah, I'll use that word. It's a privilege to be a physician. It's not a job. I feel privileged and lucky to have gone to medical school. I feel privileged to have a practice that, after 42 years, I'm seeing grandchildren from people who originally saw me and people know who I am and I know who they are. I get to come to my office and hang out with people I genuinely like. I get to take care of these people. I get to help them, and I get paid for it. Now, I ask my patients, who would leave something like that?

And so, what all of this is leading toward is that a \$20 tip in my pocket the other day has made me, for the past 24 hours, live in a state of gratitude. Making a list for all the things for which I am grateful. I may not be happy about sheltering at home. I want to go somewhere as we all do. But on my gratitude list is the fact that I'm not sick and I have a home to hang out in and I have an office to go to and I have a really loyal wonderful staff that works with me not for me. And I have patients who really like me, at least most of them do and they tell me that. They tell me how grateful they are that they come to see me. They tell me how much they like coming to see me and that the time spent with me is worthwhile.

And to sum it all up, I'll say it again. I appreciate the privilege of being a physician, especially during these times when people need us more than ever. They need our emotional support. They need our caring. They need to just be with someone whether it's online or in person that says yeah, it's okay, we're going to get through this together. But I would encourage all of us to sit around, especially in our moments when we get upset or low or unhappy about this, and make a gratitude list. Like I tell patients, fear stands for fantasized events appearing real, and we've all got those fantasies about how horrible things could be or might be, but if you stay in the moment,

things aren't so bad right now. There's an awful lot to be grateful for.

For ReachMD, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. For continuing access to this and other episodes and to add your perspective toward the fight against this global pandemic, visit us at reachmd.com and thank you for listening.