

Stopping for Turkeys: A Pharmacist's Call to Take the Time

by Rachele Poore Gaines



"I need a 10 day supply of U100 syringes." As a retail pharmacist in my small hometown, I usually follow this response with a series of interrogating questions. If these questions aren't answered the way my professional judgment warrants, I often become suspicious and turn those "seekers" away. However, sometimes we may not know the whole story. Allow me to tell you about my brother, Grant.

Grant was diagnosed with diabetes at the early age of 14, the time when adolescents are forming friendships and making important life choices and formidable decisions. Grant had an electric personality – he was popular and well-loved by everyone. He didn't want to be different and especially did not want anyone to feel sorry for him. So he chose to pretend as if he did not have diabetes. Many of his friends knew that he did, so they often tried to steer him in the right direction; but Grant was stubborn. He was determined to rise above the disease by denying its existence. On the other hand, our whole family lived as though we all had diabetes with him. We changed our own eating habits and lifestyles. He made a choice to live life to the fullest. And that he did.

He did so, initially without experiencing many complications from diabetes. Although he didn't always do the right things, the disease didn't slow him down too much. He would have occasional issues, but he had learned how to pull himself through by God's grace. He eventually did take insulin and because he was smart, he learned to manage the disease on his own. Still, not necessarily the right way. He would often forget his syringes, and he'd have to ask for them from an interrogating pharmacist like me.

I spent much of my time being angry with Grant over how he was treating himself... or rather, neglecting himself. I failed to take the time and really try to understand the magnitude of how this disease had affected his life.

Diabetes is a beast that affects all aspects of the human body. For instance, it makes one irritable. So when I encounter an irritable customer, I try to remember that perhaps it could be due to their disease. When blood glucose levels are uncontrolled, a person may appear intoxicated. Instead of quickly placing judgment, we should take time to evaluate their condition. Dealing with the many struggles of diabetes can also lead to depression. A pharmacist's awareness of these and many other facts can make a big difference in the lives of our patients.

Inevitably, the dreaded disease caught up with Grant. In 2005, at the age of 34, he had some vision problems which revealed uncontrolled blood pressure... and a spiraling downhill battle began. At that point, he finally tried to do all the right things. He stopped smoking and tried eating better, but the long-term effects of diabetes had reared their ugly head. His kidneys had permanent damage and his blood sugar fluctuated drastically from 425 down to 20. He had multiple episodes of diabetic emergencies, requiring a call to the rescue squad

several times in a 3-month period. Grant should not have been driving through all of this turmoil... but again, he was tenacious.

One day, Grant called me to ask if his insulin could be filled early. I told him, "Probably not," and asked why. Not surprisingly, he was out of town and had forgotten his insulin. I told him to go to the nearest pharmacy and to call me right away if his insurance rejected the claim. Later that evening, Grant called me. When I asked about his insulin, he said that the pharmacist was unable to fill it... so he went home. I chastised him briefly for not calling me sooner so that I could have helped. Two hours later, his blood sugar dropped quickly, he lost consciousness, his SUV drove into a tree, and he died tragically at the age of 35.



Grant (1971-2006)

You see, as pharmacists we often get so busy with our wait times, doctor calls, drug utilization reviews and interruptions that we don't go the extra mile for patients who really need our help. We should be aware that some patients will not ask for help, even when they have serious, legitimate needs. There are times when we should be more sensitive to their situation and go above and beyond what we normally

do for patients, without compromising the legal system. Perhaps we can make a phone call to their insurance company or give them a few tablets to hold them over..., or at the very least, show concern for their situation. We need to follow Christ's commands in Luke 10:27 (NIV) to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." But who is our neighbor?

In Luke 10:30-37 (NIV), Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Our neighbor is the patient who asks for counsel, as well as the one who doesn't ask. It is our job to pause and provide not only our professional knowledge, but also our compassion. We will always have our daily tasks in front of us. In the pharmacy, there will always be something that requires our time and attention. These tasks are important, but our patients are real people with real needs. Sometimes the need is not easily seen, but must be sought. Sometimes we must be stopped in our tracks to be made aware of the needs right in front

of us... and God stops us in many different ways. For instance, as my family and I were riding in the hearse on the way to my brother's funeral, the car came to a complete stop in the middle of the road. We looked out the window and saw that we were stopped because a flock of turkeys was crossing the road. We all laughed and commented that it was just like Grant to make us late for his funeral. A couple of weeks later, I was driving down a completely different road and amazingly, I once again had to stop for a flock of turkeys crossing. I thought about my brother, chuckled, and drove on. Since my brother passed away, I have had to literally stop for turkeys crossing the road about a dozen times. Every time this happens, I realize that it is not a coincidence; I know that it is intentional and only from God. One morning, my husband called from his car and told me to look outside. When I did, there was a flock of turkeys in our front yard and he had to stop for them. I quickly called my parents (who live across the road) and told them to look outside at the turkeys. I even took pictures of them. I didn't want anyone to miss this gift God had given me: the gift of a reminder that life is precious, so take time to stop for turkeys. Take time to care. Take time to help. Take time to love your neighbor as yourself.

As pharmacists, we are busy. There is rarely a time in our day when we have a free moment. So when we are asked to stop what we are doing and help someone in need, we must see it not as an annoying interruption, but as a divine opportunity. We have opportunities

every day—every hour—to be Jesus to a hurting world. Let's look up and make sure we're not missing our chance. Although many patients are bold enough to ask for our help, some won't ask because they don't want to "bother" us. So let's take the time to be deliberate and proactive in reaching out and helping others... after all, Jesus was (and is) never too busy to reach out and meet our needs. †



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