

## CHEZ DOCTOR

### Modern Medicine — Bane or Wonder?

*Written sometime in 1996 or 1997*

So, I went to the doctor's office today, finally, one year after a nagging, small ear infection started plaguing me.

Actually I went last year once, when it was new, but I didn't keep putting in the drops for as long as I should have.

Now I rarely go to doctors' offices and didn't plan to go today. It's just that, well, after the Truck Episode recently, I mused, why should I continue to let myself go downhill like the truck, until things get, well, desperate? So at lunch I went and made an eye appointment (really I need a new pair of glasses and my insurance pays up to \$100. Also I need new contacts since these disposables have been in my eyes eight months and they're only supposed to last a week or two). After lunch I called Kaiser (local HMO which my insurance pays 100% for) and asked if I could come in for a chronic, nagging, but rather minor ear infection.

Surprisingly, they wanted me to go today. They considered my infection "urgent" even though I informed them I'd been putting off calling for a year. Urgent, yeah, right.

The other option was an appointment weeks from now. No biggie, I'd go at 4:30 (perfect excuse to leave work early anyway).

Leaving my cubicle at 4:05, I got to Kaiser, went to the wrong floor, got re-directed, got in line, got my papers, put them in the in box in the "Urgent" arena, and planned to sit down with the most recent copy of "Computer Currents" (which I carried with me since I had no desire to read Family Circle or worse yet, Readers' Digest).

I was about to sit down when then called my name. "DENNIS BRUMM, please follow me," said the nurse.

Now some dozen or so folks were waiting for care, but they obviously didn't have a 4:30 appointment like I did. Guilt swept through me at having such luck to get in so quickly.

The young nurse took me into the room. "What's the problem?" she asked.

"Ear," I stated. It's been going on for about a year now, but I just don't go to doctors.

Nasty look #1.

“Let me take your blood pressure.”

“Oh no,” I thought. I know it’s high when I don’t do my vitamins and potassium and, well, I lead a sedentary lifestyle and have too much stress at work. And I hadn’t had the proper time to prepare mentally for this visit.

“Your blood pressure is high,” said nurse.

“Could be related to the 15 or 20 cups of coffee I’ve had today,” I confessed.

Dirty look #2.

“Are you taking any drugs or on any medication?”

“Only coffee.”

“No other problems?”

“Only my ear.”

“Then you won’t have to undress.”

“Kinky,” I thought. I’ve never had to undress for an ear infection before, and I had no intention of undressing for this one either.

“Someone will be right with you.”

And indeed, in less than 10 seconds, in came a nurse practitioner.

They’re cheaper to pay than doctors, so they’re in charge of Urgent Care.

Nurse Practitioner was nice enough, but this never stops me from giving my tirade about the evils of modern (and ancient) medicine.

“My, you haven’t been here often,” she said, looking at my history, which included one other trip for the same ear infection.

“No, I don’t go to doctors,” I said. “Don’t believe in Western medicine at all, except once and a while when it’s convenient. I’m here today because you have the power and control to give me something for this ear problem that I can’t go out and get on my own.”

She gave me weird look #1.

“Oh, now don’t worry. I don’t do Eastern medicine either, really. Just avoid it all.”

“Your blood pressure is high. It could damage your organs...”

“...not surprised it’s high. I’ve had over a dozen cups of coffee today. Besides, I do everything wrong.”

“You should be concerned...”

“You know, genetically, we’re really supposed to be running around in jungles and get eaten by the time we’re 25 or so. Anything after that is, well, just icing on the cake, wouldn’t you say?”

Weird look #2, though she WAS obviously being entertained.

“Let me take your blood pressure.”

She proceeded, and continued. “What about your family?”

“They’re all dead,” I said.

Look of distress #1.

“Mother died when she was 54.”

“Of what?”

“She had a heart attack.”

Look of distress #2.

“Then you’re at risk.”

“She was outside exercising, actually working in the garden, which she did ALL the time, when it happened. Didn’t help her much, did it?”

“Hrmph.”

“She was lithe (unlike me), and believed in all those things medicine promoted back there in the 50’s and 60’s. Including white bread.”

“Your father?”

“Cancer, age 65.”

“You really need to control the blood pressure.”

“I really need you to look at my ear.”

She proceeded, first looking at the wrong one despite my protestations, then tryin’ to look way up in the right one.

“No, no, not up there; it’s close to the opening. It itches more than it hurts, actually. I’ll be good this time, and use the medicine as it’s prescribed. I promise.”

“What about brothers and sisters?”

“Don’t have any. Lots of cousins. Some of them are still alive, actually.”

“Did the ear drops we gave you work last time?”

“Well, you didn’t actually GIVE them to me. But yeah, I could tell a difference for the better when I used them.”

“If it’s fungal and the antibiotic doesn’t work, you know you could use vinegar, ascorbic acid, and it will get rid of the fungus.”

“Vinegar is acetic acid,” I said.

“I’m going to make an appointment to have your blood pressure checked in a couple of weeks.”

“Sure. I can control it if I want; just need to get a new jar of potassium, that’s all. Don’t do anything right these days. My truck, well, it just fell apart on me, so I suppose I shouldn’t let that happen to me too.”

“Lots of our medicines, you know, well, they’re made from plants and things.”

“Yeah, right. Like the DuPont plant over in Delaware, right?”