

“The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes.”

—GK Chesterton

Happy New Year!

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Chesterton loved a verbal exchange; the chance to debate and both speak and listen. I think he would be horrified to see the current status of the US re: political discussion. I'm with him.

Enough politics. At the end of another year (and start of a fresh one) I find it nearly impossible to veer off my typical path to think about the past. The “Wet Read Historical Moment”. Our topic for today is, drum roll please ... **Professional courtesy.**

I am going to imagine that many of you younger types don't know what I'm talking about. Allow me to educate you. In the old days (pre-crazy insurance, bottom line, venture capital-owned imaging centers, etc), there was a certain agreement. Hard to call it a rule, because sometimes people didn't play along (and oh, Lord, how we all knew and hated **those** people).

But we had this physician-to-physician agreement that we didn't bill a comrade-in-arms for services. Or, we billed what their insurance would pay and refused to accept another cent. If their insurance didn't pay, didn't matter. We didn't even barter. No, we don't need another bottle of wine. Just did it for free. I can distinctly remember seeing physicians after I finally became one and marveling at the idea. What? No bill? I participated,

too. We could dictate “professional courtesy” and the staff closed the matter. Sigh. Like many others, another tradition has bitten the dust.

For those with gray hair, can you remember the first time you got billed? Why, the hubris of that person! I'll make sure I bill them next time! And then, within years, the whole idea of professional courtesy just went away. I guess it was a matter of time, or perhaps a matter of finances. I can only speak to our industry, but as I understand it, the same thing has gone on around us. Barbers used to cut each other's hair for free (and as a piece of advice, in a barbershop with just two barbers, use the one with the crappy haircut, because the other one cut **their** hair). I hear barbers bill each other now, as well. I wonder if that has led to getting rid of partners who charged you for a bad cut?

I suppose it is a matter of fairness. Or just the further coarsening of society and a loss of collegiality. Hard to say for sure. It was a nice little perk, and it gave you another reason to be happy to be a doctor. It also allowed you to be nice to your colleagues in a very tangible way.

Find another way to be nice to your colleagues. Stay well, have a great New Year, and keep doing that good work. Mahalo.

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