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## I'm Not *That* Kind of Doctor

C Douglas Phillips, MD, FACR

**Buck Laughlin:** *Well, we're here with Dr. Theodore Millbank, President of the Mayflower Kennel Club, and Doctor, let me ask you something: I've got a little bursitis in my shoulder. Do you recommend heat or cold?*

**Dr. Millbank:** *I'm not that kind of doctor.*

—*Best in Show*

I am a radiologist, and, for what it may be worth, I'm pretty happy with that. First person in my family to make it through college, and first doctor, for sure. I went through the entire list of specialties as I traversed med school, but I settled on radiology because of a mentor who knew every freaking thing.

All the doctors in the hospital came to his office, as if visiting the mountaintop, to inquire about their patients. I was mesmerized. I just had to do that.

And so I did.

Explaining this to my folks was a bit of a reach, however. In a family with bare-bones medical knowledge, my choice of vocation became a matter of some confusion.

"Didn't the kid down the road from us become a radiology technologist?" Mom asked. "To take X-rays? Isn't that like what you're going to do?"

"Why no, I'm going to read those studies," I explained. "For that, you need a medical degree. I'll be a doctor."

"Well, he makes pretty good money, I guess. That's okay with us ... although he

didn't have to go to school that long. Didn't you say you were going to be a *real* doctor?"

Years down the road, I am a doctor, accepted (finally) by the family. And, with a multitude of aging relatives, the MD requests have been rolling in as of late. You know what I mean: Now I am the generalist, expected to weigh in on all things medical. Family visits always include requests along these lines:

"Aunt Tildie is having her lady parts removed. What would they do that for?"

"Your cousin needs a shot for antibodies. His belly got all swolled up. Should he see another doctor?"

And the inevitable, "Here, come feel this. What is that? Should I be worried?"

If I am asked to place a hand where I am not confident I will be able to explain anything at all, I usually defer and ask them to just show me what they mean. I have been asked to examine infants, toddlers, children, and all ranges of adults. I've even been asked what I thought of the cat's cough and the beagle's skin condition (both were innocuous).

It's both a blessing and a curse. I appreciate that they trust me enough to ask my opinion, even if it is free. I've actually steered a few to the right person. But rarely is that person **me**.

After all, I'm a doctor, but I'm not *that* kind of doctor.

Keep doing that good work. Mahalo.

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