

only if a patient requests a referral to “Boston,” the medical Mecca. Recently I referred a patient to a highly specialized center in a non-neurological discipline and not only got a typed note but an email asking me to call to discuss this interesting case. This was a first in over 40 years. We discussed the case. I noted that he had violated the Harvard rule of not initiating contact with a lesser institution. He told me that he had finished his residency elsewhere and was a fellow. “I missed that lecture,” he explained.

### Conclusion

Physicians usually think of good manners and politeness as pertaining to our relationship with our patients, but it applies also to our relationship with each other, and, in fact, to everyone. There is an old and famous study that measured how long doctors allowed their patients to talk before they interrupted them. The average time was 17 seconds. I don’t

know if this is still true. Politeness is a measure of respect and is the grease that makes our interactions flow smoothly. We often don’t appreciate it when things flow smoothly, but it irritatingly calls attention to itself when absent and the smooth flow is interrupted or stops abruptly. It is easier to snub an email than a phone call, but the result is the same. ❖

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[Editor’s note: See Obituary for Dr. Pera on page 77]

### Reflections on Dr. Vincent Pera

Like most native Rhode Islanders our paths seem to diverge and then cross back at certain times in life. Vincent and I grew up in the same Warwick neighborhood, followed by separate paths in college and medical school, then reunited during internal medicine training at The Miriam Hospital, after which Vincent went on to practice bariatric medicine which he committed his career to and I into private practice.

Many years later I received a phone call from Vin; a longtime colleague in his program had recently left and he had heard that I had transitioned my practice to a large hospital group and I may be available to help out with his program that was exceeding capacity. I met with Vin; nothing had changed in the years since training, his quick smile and dry sense of humor were still there masking his more serious side. At this meeting I asked Vin why he persisted over the years with this single specialty care. His response was quick – “because we have too.” I interpreted this reply as being part of his employment obligations, but I was to be proven wrong. I did go onto work with Vin one day a week for several years after that meeting, including by telemedicine during the peri-Covid period. What I observed was a segment of society that had been marginalized, desperately seeking care, and a medical system that was inept in many circumstances in providing the proper care.

Having practiced in internal medicine for 35 years I was well aware of the impact obesity has on cardiac disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer

and sleep apnea with all its ramifications, but what I did not realize was that with a thoughtful and considerate approach this disease could be addressed, treated, and in many cases cured, but it required a program with a committed staff, including nutritionists, exercise physiologists and psychologists, all led by a physician who established treatment protocols, clearly delineated goals of care, dedicated time for staff training and education, and the unlimited patience to unravel the quandary that society, and in many cases, the medical establishment had placed these patients in. Vincent epitomized this steadfast dedication and as such was revered by his staff and patients over the years..

Finally when administrative decisions were made to terminate the Weight and Wellness Program, Vincent called me shaken from the news and with a sense of underlying anger and disappointment. I attempted to put a positive spin on the situation, suggesting that there is always an end and at 67 years old retirement was not a bad idea. I told him that recreating the program would be a Herculean task given the complexity of the program and a new team that would need to be assembled and trained. Again, I asked why he would embark on this and his reply was, “because we have too.” And so he did. ❖

—RICHARD VINCENT MORGERA, MD