

On Dee's Visit to the Doctor
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My daughter Dee, as I'll call her here, is seventeen and a senior in high school. She lives with her mother in another state from where I live and I don't see her often. We stay in email contact. I'm hearing impaired and can't discern amplified sound, so no phones or Zoom.

For the past few months, Dee has been reporting that she's fidgety, can't concentrate, is having trouble understanding and remembering things, is unmotivated, and that she's having trouble sleeping. I've suggested that she look to see if something in her current situation is contributing to her issues, and that she assess her nutrition and try some stress-reduction activities. I also recommended getting a thorough physical examination from a doctor to see if something physical is accounting in whole or in part for what's going on.

A few ago, Dee went with her mother to a doctor, who said the problem with Dee is that she is anxious. The doctor prescribed some pills and told her to look for places she could cut back on her activities. She also recommended that she take some vitamin D. I didn't pick up that the doctor's take on Dee's issue was informed by a physical exam; rather, I had the impression the doctor went by Dee's report of her symptoms.

Dee's subsequent email on the doctor visit gave me pause and I devoted much of my reply to expressing my concerns and outlining what I think she should be doing. This is the part of that message where I went into that.

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Dear Dee,

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I have concerns about what came out of your session with the doctor as you described it to me.

Essentially, doctors do two things; cut on you with a knife and give you drugs. They are socially sanctioned drug dealers. Their answer to every issue (other than cutting on you) is the same: take drugs. They call them meds but they are drugs, dope, in the same category as heroin, cocaine, and crystal meth. Yes, drugs work, they make you feel better, that's why people take them. But you pay a price for taking them. If Elvis were alive, he would testify to that—he wound up depressed, fat, constipated, and dead at 42.

A big problem with drugs--particularly with the kind of personal, psychological problem you have been dealing with lately—is they distract you from learning how to take on your involvements and responsibilities fully and effectively and feel good about your life in the process.

Like every other group you will encounter in your life, doctors are capable of laying bullshit on you. I'm sorry to report that I believe that happened in your visit to the doctor a few days ago. This woman sold you on the idea that she is qualified to diagnose and treat a personal, non-medical issue in a few minutes by listening to your brief self-report. "Ah, it's anxiety," she declares. Did she say what she meant by anxiety? Basically, anxiety is fear, worry. That's your problem she pronounces, you are fearful and worried. Not stressed, or agitated, or upset, or frustrated, or angry, or feeling wronged, or feeling trapped, not feeling overwhelmed, not a negative attitude, not a thyroid problem or diabetes, not a combination of several things or something else entirely. One word—*anxiety*--captures your problem. That's it, no need to talk about it or look into it any further. According to this woman who is pretending to be a psychologist, you should take dope and look for places to cut back on your activities, and take some vitamin D. Problem solved. Simple, easy, took fifteen minutes. Here's the prescription to fill at a pharmacy. Goodbye. (By the way, the

vitamin and mineral tablets I sent a few days ago provide 125% of the recommended daily amount of vitamin D.)

Never mindlessly do what someone tells you to do. Use helping professionals, including doctors, but don't turn your life over to them. Defer to nobody.

Don't thoughtlessly put anything into your body. Read the Wikipedia or online Mayo Clinic description of this drug. How does it alter your body to get the results it gets? What are its side-effects (negative outcomes) and potential side-effects—every drug has them. Very likely, you're going to read a scary list—such things as liver problems, kidney problems, weight gain, bloating, high blood pressure, physical dependency/addiction, depression, and aggressive and suicidal thoughts. Please tell me the name of the drug you are taking—I want to learn about it.

I suggest you take as few of these pills, any pills, as possible and get off them entirely as soon as possible. Drugs are playing with fire. These doctors/drug dealers don't bother talking about this with patients—she may not have even told you the name of the drug--but in time, their patients pay a price, all dope takers pay a price.

You need to learn to wisely use drugs. I take a drug for high blood pressure, a medical condition. I know its side-effects and I've made a conscious, considered choice to take this drug and pay the price for the benefits I get from it. I don't depend on this drug alone. I do other things to keep my blood pressure down—nutrition, stress reduction, weight management.

In contrast, I was prescribed a drug for a sleep problem I was having. Per usual, the doctor didn't discuss the side-effects of this drug with me. As do all sleeping pills, it produces what is what's called a rebound effect. It works one night, but it keeps the sleep problem going the next night and even worse. So another pill. Over time, the body gets used to a drug and it takes two pills to get the same effect. And then you wind up mixing the pills with alcohol to get to sleep. The pills produce depression and lethargy and a negative attitude and the quality of your life goes down.

Did the doctor pay attention to any of that? No. This pleasant, vaguely condescending guy would have written prescriptions for re-fills of this drug forever. Finally, I'd had it. It took me a month, and I went through a really tough withdrawal, but I got off those pills. I'm as proud of myself for doing this as I am for anything I have ever done in my life. I'm now sleeping great, and my attitude and energy are better and my life is better and I'm happier. Never will I take a sleeping pill again, even over-the-counter pills. Never.

In some ways, I'm envious of this doctor you went to. I wish I could define your problem in one word (anxiety) and tell you do something that is virtually effortless like take a pill. I wish I could tell you to back off on your involvements, which would be easy for you to do. But that's not what I think would be best for you. What would be best for you will take thought and effort. It will take assuming responsibility for your life, not spending a few minutes with someone and giving your life over to them. The way to lower your anxiety, let's call it that, is to keep your mind crystal clear—pills invariably make you foggy—and to go all out to fix what isn't right in your life. I don't want you using substances to prop you up or solve your problems—alcohol, drugs, pills, food, anything. I've lived a very long life and I've seen the great cost people have paid for using substances to make things better for a while and I don't want you paying that cost.

Right now, you are doing things that are really good for you: getting enrolled at [an elite liberal arts college], the [high school] classes, golf, working on your personal development (which includes learning how to deal with life without the crutch of drugs), being with your friends this last year before you go away to college, and being with Mom. Yes, you needed to get out of that [twice-a-week, after-school job that involved a long commute] and you did. Don't back off on any of the good things you are doing. Go at them full out. That's the way to be happy and successful. You were recruited by one of the very best liberal arts colleges in this country. That happened because you went all out on your schoolwork and golf [she's golf recruit].

There are rules you have to play by to make your life work, and you played by one of them getting into [the college]. Learn what the rules of effective living are. That's one of your jobs now. One of the rules in life is that there is a connection between accomplishment and feeling good about yourself and life. Creating a good connection with someone (like Mom) and getting an A in a course and shooting a 71 in golf are ways to be happy and proud of yourself. You can get an 81 and have a good reason for it—"I'm burned out" [Dee has been leaning on this explanation in recent months]—but you're still off-kilter, things aren't right, your excuse didn't make things OK. Even if you don't succeed at something, just knowing that you gave it your best will make you feel good rather than bad,

Popping pills distract you from doing something vitally important that you need to be doing right now: attending to how you basically approach life. There are three personal qualities you need to develop in order to live well and feel life is good. What's so encouraging is that you already possess these three qualities to a significant extent and that's why you have done so well in your life up to now. You just need to keep yourself rooted in them.

* The first personal quality is a positive mental outlook. People who are happy and successful don't spend their time complaining and blaming and stewing over what isn't right and finding reasons not to do things. They find good things to do and reasons to do them. Deciding you are burned out with golf will work today and tomorrow—it's easier to veg out with TikTok and eat a Big Mac than drive to [the golf country club] or go to the gym. The problem is that as time goes along you feel vaguely depressed and down on yourself, and you notice your face and arms are getting fleshy and fat, and you finish low in the golf tournament, and you feel like a phony in your emails to [the golf coach who recruited her]. I'm serious, when I feel down, I imagine a little bird flying in and perching on my shoulder and chirping "Cheer up, Robert!"

* The second quality is the willingness to work hard. If you want to be happy and at peace in your life, you need to work hard. Really, really, really hard. Your mind and body will always give you reasons not to work hard—“Hey, cool out, we can do that tomorrow.” No. Take charge of yourself and work hard today. That’s the way to be happy tomorrow. That’s a rule you have to learn and play by. If you don’t, you’ll be forty years old someday fat and drinking red wine until bedtime and feeling that life is a waste.

* And the third quality, self-control. When you decide to do something, you do it, period. Most often, our problem isn’t that we don’t know what to do to make things better in our lives. Deep down we have a good idea of what to do, but we don’t do it. You have to learn to carry through on what you commit yourself to doing, no reasons for not doing it, no excuses. You told yourself you were going to the gym today, but now you don’t feel like it? Get your backside to the gym! If you say you are going to write me an email tomorrow, do it. No “Oh, I forgot.” Results, not reasons for not getting results. You learn anything by practicing it. Every day provides opportunities to practice self-control. You say you are going to work on math for an hour tonight, work on math for an hour tonight.

Anxiety is a word. You don’t have a word. You have whatever you are experiencing, all that you are experiencing. You need to get beyond words to the reality of your being. Be quiet and attend to yourself. What are you feeling right now, and I mean literally, how does your body feel? What pictures, images, are in your head? What thoughts do you have? What is going on in your life and how is it affecting you? Put words to all that, as many as it takes. What’s happening with you is far more complex than to be captured in one word, anxiety or any other.

If you are feeling distressed or off, is there anything in your life that is different from the way things were, say, six months or a

year ago? One thing I see--and I bet you didn't bring it up with your doctor--are the conflicts you've been having with Mom. Are they resulting in issues for you? If they are, it is better to deal with those issues than pop a pill or move downstairs or drop a course at [the high school] or walk around mad or demand an apology, all of which will keep the problem going and make it even worse. If there is a problem with Mom, the solution will come out of a positive mental attitude and hard work to create a peaceful, loving connection with your dear mom.

Look for ways other than medication and withdrawal to confront your issues. Here a couple of articles I suggest you read on managing stress and anxiety.

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-management>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-to-cope-with-anxiety>

Try some of these techniques if they make sense to you. But keep in mind that doing that will take work, effort. One of the things that makes the number doctors run on people so effective and gets them so much money—she charged your insurance hundreds of dollars for that brief encounter you had with her--is they tell people to do things that are all but effortless to pull off. Lie there while I cut on you, take this with a glass of water.

Learn from people who are happy and productive. They aren't leaning on substances. They aren't sitting around staring at their phones. They aren't grooving on the lives of internet influencers. They aren't consumed with what's wrong and grievances and resentment. They are building up their bodies, not destroying them. They are alert and alive, not numbed out. They are loving and kind and decent. They are getting good things done. They transcend the apparent dichotomies—separations--between work and play and fun. Their work is play for them, and it is fun for them, enjoyable, a good time. In moments when they are down, their little bird tells them to cheer up. And very rarely does it take a pill to do that. It just takes a smile.

Let me know what you think about this. Let me know what you need, I'm here for you. I believe in you.

Love always,

Dad.