

March 28, 1979

News

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* * * * * Practicing physician assistant
gives advice to beginning PAs.

DALLAS--Becoming part of the community--that should be high priority for the beginning physician assistant according to PA John Young from Caldwell, Texas.

At a recent gathering of PA students at The University of Texas Health Science Center in Dallas, Young gave them the benefit of his five years' experience in the small East Texas town.

"First, find a physician you can work for and be comfortable," he counseled. He stressed the importance of working for a competent physician, one who is up-to-date and not threatened by someone just finishing training, "someone interested in you as a person, who wants you to be a better clinician each day that you work, interested in your continuing medical education."

Young advocated serving a preceptorship, not only for the training, but also as a good way to find a job. His preceptorship had been arranged as a rotation with several physicians, and one of them, Dr. Joe Smith in Caldwell, didn't particularly want a PA. But Dr. Smith was the only doctor in the county, and Young arrived at the height of a flu epidemic. Before the end of the first day Dr. Smith started talking about what "we" will be doing in 10 years.

"It was just like getting married without anyone ever asking," Young said.

"You have to be a part of your community," he emphasized. Caldwell is an agrarian community so he and his wife bought a small farm and "run a few head of cattle."

"That way I'm able to identify with the patient who comes in with hypertension. I know there's a drought, and that beef prices are low and feed prices are high. The patient knows I can identify with him. This understanding helps."

He admonished students moving to small towns from the city to go in with a positive attitude and to look for the positive aspects of the town. "People will know you, and they will want you to like and accept them and their community. Don't gripe about how far you have to drive to a movie," he said.

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Much has been written about competition in relationships between PAs and nurses. "But none of it applies to individual PAs and individual nurses. From the very first I told the nurses if they thought my order was dangerous, scary or useless, not to carry it out and to tell me how they felt. That has never happened," said Young. Nurses give him a lot of good suggestions, however, and he follows many of them. He pointed out that in the small community, he cares for the nurses' families and they care for his.

About patients he said, "I try not to leave the room till they're ready for me to go. If someone has a croupy child, they really don't look bad during the day, but they get worse at night. I call at night and see how the child is. Or if someone has been in the emergency room after an accident, I call to see how they're doing or if they need to ask a question. I've been in that position, and I appreciated knowing that somebody cared how I was doing. I'm not calling to see if I can become more popular than the physician."

The PA stressed the team approach: "Don't play one-upmanship with the doctor. If you catch a mistake, be kind because you may make the next one."

Relating one proof that his services are valued in Caldwell, Young told how a Medicare investigator kicked him out of the local hospital, saying there was no provision for payment for a PA's services. Dr. Smith and the people in town started calling Washington. PAs became eligible for payment that day.

"I don't think that would have happened in a city, but Dr. Smith knew my services were needed. So did the patients. Now we have hospitals referred to us by Medicare to tell them how we justified PA services," Young said.

Young pulled no punches in dealing with problem areas.

"Everybody worries about lawsuits--I deal with that by avoiding potential problem patients. For example, somebody who's just passing through town or somebody who seems uncomfortable about seeing me instead of the physician--I get these patients in to somebody else just as quickly as possible," said Young.

Since Young graduated from the University of Texas Medical Branch (in Galveston) in 1973, he has been active professionally as well as in the Caldwell community. He is past president of the Texas Academy of Physician Assistants and has served as a member of the admissions committee for the UTHSCD physician assistant program. He serves on the advisory committee for the UTMB program.

In Caldwell Young is president-elect of the Chamber of Commerce and lay lecturer for St. Mary's Catholic Church. He was named an Outstanding Young Man of America in 1975.

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