

A Problem with Expectations: An American-born Nurse's Encounter with an East Indian Doctor

It was a busy, rainy Monday with a lot of new admissions. A number of nurses called in sick and tempers were short. Dr. Rao, an East Indian male physician ordered one of the nurses, Amy, to help him with one of his patients immediately. When Amy responded, "I can't help you right now, I will be with you in 15 minutes", Dr. Rao became incensed and ordered her to drop everything she was doing and come at once.

Knowing that his request was not an emergency, Amy stayed focused on her tasks, distributing meds and found him 15 minutes later. When she asked why he was so upset, he said, "When I ask for your assistance, I expect you to drop what you are doing and help me." Amy was aghast and told him she didn't think that was a reasonable expectation and that he shouldn't expect her to jump at his commands like a dog to its master. Dr. Rao glared at her and stormed out of the room saying, "I would never be treated this way in my country!"

When Amy consulted with some East Indian nurses on her unit, she was told that her reaction was a blow to his self-esteem and dignity as a doctor. In his country, a nurse would never question a physician's orders. Amy decided that since she worked closely with Dr. Rao, she wanted to repair the rift that had just occurred.

Amy arranged to meet with Dr. Rao and discuss a different approach when asking for help in a non-emergency situation. First, Amy apologized to Dr. Rao for snapping at him; she went on to explain why she may not always be able to help him exactly when he wants her to help him-as not an act of insubordination, but, similar to him, as a desire to deliver the best possible patient care in an environment with a lot of constraints. Amy continued to find ways to empathize with Dr. Rao and to find solutions that would help them work together in a more respectful and harmonious way.

While Dr. Rao was still feeling upset by their initial encounter, Amy's reaching out to him was disarming and helped him begin the process of developing a different relationship with asking for her assistance.

© 2007 SupportForNurses.com. This article is free to distribute provided the PDF is unchanged and these credits remain intact. For more articles, Tips Booklets and Nurses' Toolkits, please visit www.supportfornurses.com.