

# A Doctor by Any Other Name

by Brenda Denzler

She has been a doctor to me in every way but on paper. It used to be that when pharmacists or other health care providers would refer to her as “Dr.,” I would correct them. “She’s a family nurse practitioner,” I would say, “although for me she IS my doctor.” I finally just gave it up and let them call her what they will. After all, technically they may be incorrect, but practically speaking, they couldn’t be any closer to the truth.

Once upon a time, I had an actual doctor whom I liked very much. Then, one day, I went in to see her about something and she was gone—out on medical leave, I was told. I was assigned to her colleague, instead: Dr. P-D.

“I’m having trouble getting a deep breath, sometimes,” I told his nurse during the check-in phase of my visit. “I had asthma as a small child, but I outgrew it. That’s the only breathing problems I’ve ever had. This time, the shortness of breath started in the middle of the night, right after I’d mowed my yard one day. It persisted even after I woke up and moved around. I’m a new homeowner, and this was my first time to mow.” I thought for a second, then threw in my self-diagnosis: “Could this be related to allergies?”

The nurse listened to my lungs, made a few notes in my chart, and left the room. In a few minutes, Dr. Put-Down swept in. He listened politely while I told him the same thing, then he looked at me and said, “You’re just anxious. I can give you a prescription for Prozac or Paxil.” No exam. Nothing. He didn’t lay a hand on me—not even to shake mine.

A few years earlier I had had a very unpleasant encounter with this kind of medication, which I’d taken in what turned out to be a vain hope that it would help my energy levels. When I discovered the real energy solution, I tried to taper myself off the anti-depressant. Ironically enough, withdrawing from it resulted in the one and only clinical depression I’ve ever had in my life. A class action suit was filed by multitudes of others who had the same problem. We settled out of court, and the company was forced to amend

its product information to include the fact that the drug was habit-forming.

“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” There was no way I was going to risk another drug-induced clinical depression by taking an anti-depressant for a problem that was not unambiguously psychogenic.

I walked out of the clinic feeling diminished as a person. My new doctor hadn’t been my partner in trying to find a practical answer to my health concern; in fact, he had been dismissive and peremptory...all on the basis of being with me for just five minutes. I sat in my car in the parking lot and cried for a bit, feeling like a worthless piece of.... Then I slowly got angry. I realized that I didn’t have to put up with this. Dr. Put-Down would not become my doctor! That’s when the hunt began.

A co-worker told me about a doctor who was supposed to be great, so I went to see her. Although I was her first appointment for the day, Dr. Multi-Task was nearly an hour late seeing me. When she did finally get there, she left three times during our brief session to take care of matters for other patients. I tried to tell her my brief little medical story and hoped she was focused enough on me to remember what I was saying. In the end, she looked at me and said, “You’re overweight. I think you need a sleep study because this might be sleep apnea.”

“I’ve thought of that,” I said. “But wouldn’t sleep apnea resolve itself once I’d woken up and was moving around? This doesn’t. It hangs on for hours.”

Dr. Multi-Task wrote orders for a sleep study anyway. I never had it done. The diagnosis made no sense to me.

Then someone suggested I try Amanda. She wasn’t a doctor, they said, but she was one of the best FNPs around. So once again, I made an appointment. Once again, I recited my little medical symptom story, leaving off my allergy query at the end. Amanda looked at me and said, “Why don’t we start with the most obvious answer and see if that works. If not, we can explore further. This could be allergies. A lot of people have a return of this kind of childhood ailment, when they get older. Let’s

try an inhaler and see if that helps.”

Right then and there, I knew I’d found my “medical home”—years before that phrase assumed the currency it enjoys today.

In the last 12 years, Amanda has been my health care partner. She has been my “doctor” in the truest sense. She has always listened to me and has always taken both my complaints and my ideas about what could be causing them (if any) very seriously. When I thought I had IBC, she got me in to see a specialist within a week—and we were proven right. When I thought I had a DVT, she got me into imaging within a day, even though the “clinical evidence” for it was a little weak—and we were proven right. Sometimes she hasn’t agreed with me, but she has always listened carefully and always respected my point of view. As a result, I learned to listen carefully to her, too. If Amanda said, “No,” I knew it was because of the evidence and not because she was being arrogantly all-knowing and dismissive.

I’ve often said that when Amanda retires, I am going to stop getting sick, because I can never find anyone who will be a health care partner like her. I’m only half joking! I can’t be sure I’ll never get sick again. Advancing age and being a cancer patient have made sure of that. The question is, can I ever find another health care partner like her? Given how many tries it took to find her, I have my doubts.

Still, I have to try. In my quest, I’ll be sure to keep my options open. My next beloved primary care provider might actually be an MD or a DO, but it may also be a physician’s assistant or another FNP. A doctor by any other name.... But there will never be another Amanda.

*Brenda Denzler was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer in 2009. She became a cancer survivor on the very day she was diagnosed.*

**Survival Gear In Sanford**



**The Supplies You Need to Build Your Home Emergency Kit**  
 1000 N. Horner Blvd, Sanford  
 919.704.4211 ■ www.CampingSurvival.com  
 Open Tue-Sat. Veteran owned.  
**FREE FOOD TASTING EVERY SATURDAY.**



Circle City Pilates offers personal training on the Balanced Body Pilates Reformer. Movements reposition the body, promoting length, strength, flexibility and balance.  
**FREE 30-minute Focus Session**  
**MAT CLASSES, Tuesdays, 9:30 am**  
**at The Yoga Garden in Pittsboro**  
 Contact Karen Dalton  
**www.circlecitypilates.com**  
 13 Hillsboro Street, Suite 7, Pittsboro  
 (The Blair Building)

**Unique NC Hand-crafted Gifts for Every Occasion**

*Find contemporary and traditional pottery, blown glass, wood turnings, jewelry, metalwork, toys, folk art, garden art, kaleidoscopes, baskets, fiber art and more.*



**NORTH CAROLINA CRAFTS GALLERY**  
 212 West Main Street, Carrboro  
 919-942-4048  
 Mon-Sat: 10am-6pm; Sun: 1-4pm  
 www.nccraftsgallery.com



*The right team.*  
**RIGHT HERE.**

For expert, dedicated health care, you don’t have to look very far. At UNC Chatham Hospital in Siler City, we offer direct access to the exceptional care you’d expect from UNC Health Care. With a wide range of services, we’re committed to providing personalized care in a convenient and comfortable setting.



**LEARN MORE at CHATHAMHOSPITAL.ORG**

