

The Passive Abyss

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I recently found myself on the "client" side of the health care equation. I was on vacation - Canada to be exact - visiting my family and looking forward to some rest and relaxation. It would be a nice change of pace from the summer in Austin, that's for sure. Within hours of my arrival, I was stepping out onto my father's front porch ... placed my foot in an awkward position ... and suddenly, I felt an ouch. I sat down - and within moments, found myself trying to problem-solve my way out of it. That's the physical therapist in me - collecting data, assessing my active and passive ranges of motion, trying to make sense of my apparent clumsiness doing something I've done routinely for 40-odd years! I stood up and tried walking on it, but that wasn't comfortable at all. Yes, I found myself limping a bit. This isn't good, I muttered under my breath. Having some knowledge of these types of problems (for the past 19 years of my career), I found myself going through all the possible options. During all of this, I found the "patient" voice creeping in. What should I do now? Should I have someone take a look at it? Do I need an X-ray? Would this completely mess up my vacation? How would I be able to run tomorrow?

And all of these swirling thoughts - in the mind of someone that actually knows how the system works ... how the body works ... and can problem solve the situation then and there.

What happens to the person who isn't well-versed in all of this?

Maybe the thoughts sound a little like this. You need to get on with life. You're not sure if you should go to see someone or not ... is it broken? Would my insurance cover it? Will it be considered a pre-existing condition? Can I afford it? What will happen to my recreational activities? Work? Day-to-day life?

Very real thoughts, I admit. For the average person, this could be a most daunting task, to be certain. It creates a fear - an unknown - that has the strong potential to make us feel passive, threatened, and anxious. It's hard to be "in control" in circumstances like these. Can't someone please fix it for me - now?

I caught myself thinking about this as I was sitting there, pondering my new-found ankle sprain. It was an interesting paradox, a moment of realization. Within the problem lies the solution. Within any challenge lies the opportunity for learning. I was acutely reminded of the guiding principles of self-care that would lead me forward. The repair and healing process, the things that I teach patients day in and day out, came back to me in resounding fashion. Instead of throwing up my arms in despair, and falling headlong into the "passive abyss" awaiting me, I went back to principles to guide me. Once I did this, I found the element of "personal power" return to me. The fear and uncertainty started to diminish, and I realized that with some basic principles, I could manage this problem effectively.

And so the story goes.

The moral of the story? It's very easy to fall into that "passive abyss", although you may be fully engaged in the process and aware of it's existence. Even if you understand the principles of self-care, you need to continue to remind yourself of them - over and over and over - and apply them with great vigilance. "Live by the principles" should be the mantra - especially in times of duress and challenge.

Principles guide us ... guided me ... back to function ... back to life.

Don't lose sight of them, even in the most challenging of times. A deep dark passive abyss awaits otherwise!

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