

2017 Banquet thoughts – Dr. Mack and team members

My name is Matthew Mack and I am the Medical Director at His Branches Health Services. I am up here with 4 of our wonderful staff members, and we are here to represent the clinic. Most importantly we are representing the Stories of the patients we serve in our community.

Anthony De Mello said "A lost coin is found by means of a candle; the deepest truth is found by means of a simple story."

10 years ago, I was in residency and it was hard, and it was long and it was fast, and I got very discouraged because practicing medicine felt like that hamster on the wheel...and there was no time to really listen to patients stories. I even quit my residency program, and decided to leave medicine to become a mental health counselor, but luckily, I met Dr. Morehouse. The first patient I saw with him was a woman who had survived a terrible past of abuse and prostitution – she sat there with him and looked strong and happy – I clearly remember them laughing together, and was obvious that he had helped her through SO much of her story. Dr. Morehouse definitely believed with his whole heart that “the deepest truth is found by means of a simple story” and not through 17 lab tests and cat scans.

It was largely Dr. Morehouse’s role in MY own story that convinced me to finish residency and join him in bringing the type of healing to people that happens when we not only fix their high blood pressure, but truly listen to their story.

We have found that listening to our patients builds trust that then allows us to challenge them in a way that empowers them to take control of their lives. Here are 2 stories of patients whose names I’ve changed that demonstrate the power of trust that’s built through listening to stories.

Glen was a slave to opiate addiction for years. He started seeing Jess, a provider with us at His Branches. Jess listened to Glen’s struggles, and built a trust with him. When Jess refused to enable his addiction and prescribe opiate medication to him, this trust helped Glen NOT to run away, but to TRULY seek help for his addiction. A year later his words for Jess were that she literally QUOTE “saved my life.”

Sarah was a struggling mother of 4 children who had been unemployed on disability and receiving financial assistance through the Department of Human services for years. After 2 years of relationship growing and actively listening to her story, I was

firm with her that I would not fill out her disability paperwork because she has not followed through on those actions that would help her take hold of her health situation. Sarah was initially upset with me, but two months later, and to my surprise, she returned to clinic to see me. She had taken action, gone to physical therapy, and felt better. When I asked her about her disability paperwork, she replied “well, you were right Dr. Mack. I went to physical therapy, started feeling better, and I got a job.”

As we considered how to share with you tonight what it was we do at His Branches Health Services, we wanted to honor patients’ own stories of their experiences with us. So we contacted many of our patients and asked them if they would be willing to share stories of their experiences with us, and there were quite a few who were willing. So here, in addition to the 2 stories of transformation I just shared, are some patients’ own experiences at His Branches, *written in their own words*. Our patients’ words will be read by staff members who are an integral part of our care-team at the clinic. They’re going to come up one at a time and tell you what their role is in the clinic, and as they share these patients’ experiences really appreciate the vulnerability of what each one is sharing with us.

The following testimony was written by a patient who has been seeing Dr. Morehouse for the past 4 years and will be read by Dan Forte, a nurse in our practice:

My experience with Dr. Morehouse and his team continue to be a life changing experience. When I went to see Dr. Morehouse initially, my life was in a completely upside down and shattered place. My mental, physical, and spiritual states were completely broken and many days it was a huge struggle to find hope. Dr. Morehouse counseled me in this hard time with the greatest of love, compassion, care, and discernment. God’s love and grace brought me to Dr. Morehouse and I am not sure I would be here today if God had not brought Dr. Morehouse into my path. I am eternally grateful.

It has always been a team effort at Grace Family Medicine. We did not have the insurance initially that covered my medications, but Dr. Morehouse and his team always made sure that I had what I needed, through samples in the office and many phone calls to my insurance company. The girls at the front desk always exhibited the greatest of love and care in their welcome and greeting to me when I entered

the office. In the early days, when I was struggling so deeply, the girls up front recognized the difficult place I was in mentally and emotionally and always made provision to keep me as comfortable as they could until I saw Dr. Morehouse.

Dr. Morehouse has always spent the needed time with me to go through all the details of where things were at with my medications, and he has always continued to counsel, mentor and encourage me in the choices I need to make. He always prayed with me before I left the room.

Again, I am eternally grateful to God for the complete blessing that Dr. Morehouse is to my life and to my family. He is and continues to be a huge, huge part of my healing journey.

May God continue to bless this practice and ministry in His fullest of blessings!

The following was written by a 57 year old patient and will be read by Robin Alexander, my medical secretary:

I met my doctor at His Branches health services after having to find another doctor because I was not satisfied with where I was receiving treatment.

My relationship with my doctor at His Branches has been eye-opening! My doctor has always been straightforward with me; he challenges me and always wants the best for me.

There was a situation at work that was quite stressful for me; my doctor was very helpful in allowing me to have time off from work, to get my mental being back in order.

Now that I am dealing with prostate cancer, my doctor has been a pillar in moving my treatment forward with my oncologist.

Not only is he my physician, he is a friend, and my prayer partner. The decision to follow my doctor to His Branches Health Services was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

The following was written by a 37 year old who only became a patient of ours within the last 6 months and will be read by Jennifer Wolford, our Nurse Manager:

At the time of writing this I am, like so many others in our city, without power and expected to be so for the next couple of days. Not having the option of computer or internet won't prevent me from sharing a little with you however. I still have pen and paper; it's something we might consider outdated but we also know it is more personal. I think this is fitting, since it reflects the attention I get at Grace Family Medicine. Although I have not been a patient here for very long, I can tell you that it feels like a house call every time I go in for an appointment. The office may not be lavished in newly remodeled or fancy decor, but the heart felt warmth from everyone I have met at the reception desk is reflected on all the patients in the waiting room. I am amazed at how kind the nurses are, how it feels I've known them for a long time. Before coming here, I used to dread appointments with my previous doctor, where I felt treated only as a dollar amount and a symptom. With my doctor at Grace Family Medicine, I am talked to - not down to, and treated as one of God's creations - not just another number. For the first time ever, a doctor talked to me about nutrition and he was very knowledgeable. I actually feel like I have a voice in my treatment and am not dictated to. Perhaps the most powerful tool they use in their practice is prayer and I truly thank God to have found these wonderful people.

The following was written by a 59 year old woman who is grateful for the support she received through a very tragic time in her life and will be read by Crystal Griffin, one of our Medical Secretaries:

I have been active all my life. This has kept me in good health and away from medications and doctors. I joined Joy Family Medicine for annual checkups and allergy relief. At my first visit with Alicea Reeves, she asked many questions and got to know a little about me and my lifestyle. I was impressed that she took as much time as she did. I felt comfortable and felt it was a good match.

Little did I know I would come to need and depend not only on her, but her staff. I refer to Jennifer Wolford and April Lee as Alicea's girls.

On April 27th 2016 I was in a horrible house fire. I was able to get my dear friend who was 94 years old and her beloved dog out. We ended up in the ICU Burn unit at Strong Memorial for burns and smoke inhalation. I was there one week. My friend died two days later. I was devastated.

On my follow up with Alicea after my release from the hospital, I was not only devastated but I felt lost and alone. Alicea and her girls were so caring and kind. They held my hand and gave me their shoulders to cry on. I have even gone there without an appointment, feeling out of control and not knowing what to do or where to go. One time it felt like I was there for hours. April was right by my side. She didn't leave me and didn't want me to leave until I had calmed down.

On Alicea's advice I sought out a mental health clinic. I go and will need to continue to go. I am feeling better, but not were I once was.

I wanted to say Thank you, Alicea, April, and Jennifer for being there for me when I truly needed someone. I am Blessed.

Alicea, April and Jenn, you are a true asset to the Joy Medical Group and the community in which you serve.

I am forever grateful.

Relationship and unity is built around shared vulnerability, so we are very grateful to these patients who were willing to open their heart with those stories. Please join me in a round of applause for the courage of these patients.

As medicine and technology advance, we are under increasing pressure towards productivity, and it is harder and harder to spend the time needed with each patient, listening to stories and taking the needed time to really build a relationship. The energy of our team is spread thinner and wider. Many days we get caught up in the whirlwind of the day's demands, and we stop listening to our patients' stories. One of our biggest challenges is to keep our eyes and hearts open to the stories that are continuously in front of us every day, despite the whirlwind.

This work, while very rewarding, is often very tiring. We are SO grateful to all of you, our closest supporters without whom we could NOT remain standing amidst the whirlwind. You are our families, our neighbors, our teachers, our co-laborers, our friends. We feel your support in our spirits and in our hearts.

No, you may ask how, in addition to simply being the amazing people that you are, your financial contribution might help us.

By helping to undergird our financial base, we are allowed some freedom from the pressures to see a huge volume of patients every day in order to rack up the reimbursements that help us cover all of our costs. While we are learning how to be fully present and attentive with our patients in shorter time blocks, it definitely helps not to feel the weight of the financial demands weighing as heavily on each day's schedule.

Your contribution also helps to support the quality of medical care we deliver by allowing us to make quicker and more thorough diagnoses on site. Being able to purchase an onsite EKG machine to monitor heart rhythms, or an on-site diabetes A1C testing device are just 2 items that your donation could help us afford. Delivering quality physical care is central to building the trust through which we are then able to bring emotional and spiritual healing to our patients.

Finally, more than 60% of the people we see at His Branches are insured through Medicaid, and many are in process of obtaining health insurance and are not insured at the time of their appointment, albeit, our reimbursements suffer. Your donation helps us fill in the gaps for these patients. It helps us, for example, to use a sliding-scale for uninsured patients that they can afford, helping them to take responsibility for their care, while remaining realistic in their financial situation. Your gift helps us not to close the door to someone whose story really needs to be heard and honored.

Thank you again for who each and every one of you is in our lives. We are honored to carry on this work with you at our sides.

Matthew Mack, MD