

12-1-11 Wherever You Go

Last year at a family dinner party, my brother's girlfriend complained of a sore neck. I walked over and scrunched my finger tips onto the woman's scalp, gradually moving the scrunch down her neck and onto her shoulders. She oohed and ahed, rolling her head around, declaring that it was better already. My brother was kind of jealous. "Show me how to do that." he ordered. When I placed my fingers and thumb onto his trapezius muscles, he complained, "Ow! That hurts!" "That's because they're tense." I explained. "My chiropractor tells me that even a strong and fit person's muscles, when relaxed and at rest, should feel like cooked oatmeal."

In response to this statement, cries of disbelief and calls of volunteers began to fly from around the table. "Yeah, right!" "I don't believe it!" Others were begging to get involved in this little demonstration: "Do me!" Try me!" "Me, me!" One after another, I "tested" trapezius muscles. Some people hated it. Their muscles were tense. Others loved it and thanked me. Their muscles might have had some tension but as they were stretched, they relaxed, relaxing the person at the same time.

When I told my chiropractor the story, he said, "And now you know why, especially when I am travelling, I never tell the truth when asked what I do for a living. Instead, I usually say, "I am a sanitarian". No one has ever asked me to help them. They don't even ask questions. They just say, "Oh...I see"

I guess I'm not very good at pretending and have never minded people knowing I am a health agent and a sanitarian but when people in my life know this, they do ask questions!

Is it okay to leave these chafing dishes out?

It's okay for this ground up food to go down the drain, isn't it?

How often should I get my septic tank pumped?

Can my children's school be tested for air quality?

What is that tan froth that gathers at the edge of the pond?

For Thanksgiving, my family knows they can entertain each other by taking turns making fun of me and peppering me with questions. There were lots of questions and comments on the dinner. The stuffing was cooked separately, out of the turkey, reducing cooking time and reducing the cooling down time while dinner is being served. All the leftover food was packed up in portions and in the fridge within a couple hours. Add up all those dinners being served and stored safely all around the country and you're looking at one nice big public health picture. (or not, depending on how those food preparations were handled)

After dinner talk included health issues, of course. M, how is your fibromyalgia? Would you like to try this pillow heated up in the microwave? It relaxes the muscles. Nic, how is your knee? It sounds like it was a pretty scary time for you when the cellulitis set in. It's great to see you back to mountain bike riding!

Whether it is chronic, as with the fibromyalgia, or acute, as was the bacterial infection, these are personal health issues that form public health problems for millions of people. Do they have insurance? Is the problem cured or is it only treated with the least expensive route approved by the insurance company? When time is wasted on ineffective treatments, we risk adding to the growing population of people who are disabled in varying degrees. When people

can't be helped, lose their job and their pride; that adds up to a dismal public health picture. With the games insurance companies are playing, I think that will get darker before it gets better.

On the way home from my family gathering in Maine, I had the pleasure of riding with my niece and my sister's granddaughter, both college freshmen. They asked if I minded if they turned up the radio. I did not. Happiness with young people and music are the ingredients of one health promotion program.

When we stopped for a bathroom break, the restroom had Clivus brand composting toilets. They giggled at me for being so thrilled about this. "Look, girls, composting toilets! I know it looks dark down there but there's no odor." And, while we washed our hands I said, "This is just grey water. With very little treatment, it can join the groundwater or be used for irrigation because it is not mixed with, you know, the "black" water." Just as my sister's granddaughter was shaking her head and saying, "Oh, Cathy, always the health agent!" a woman stepped out from her stall to wash her hands and commented, "Thank you for that information! It was interesting and I want my grandchildren to inherit a world with enough clean water!"

Wherever you go, there goes public health. Hopefully.

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