



healing words

BY MARK W. McCLURE, MD

the BIG “C”

The first thing that popped into my head when I contemplated our topic for this issue, the “magic of movement,” was the word “change”—that unwelcome companion, who has a nasty habit of showing up uninvited at the most inopportune time. Nevertheless, despite its poor manners, change is a visitor we must all contend with.

The best place for me to start detailing my close encounters with the “c” word is during those awkward teenage years. As I navigated those troubled waters, I had plenty of practice with the “c” word. My on-the-job training opportunities surfaced every time my carefully (and I might add, unilaterally) wrought plans were dashed by an “over-my-dead-body” stance from my dad. (I must have missed something in the translation though. Years later, when I tried this technique on my son, it lacked the same pizzazz. I can’t wait to see how he fares when his turn rolls around.)

My dad did manage to hit a home run. As college loomed on the horizon, I couldn’t decide what I wanted to do when I grew up (aren’t 17 year olds supposed to know these sorts of things?). Seizing upon my indecision, he suggested that I might want to consider studying to become a doctor. Not knowing any better, I said, “sure, why not,” and then proceeded to dive headfirst, arms at my side, into the deep end and swim with the sharks for the next 12 years of my life.

Moving ahead to my medical school days, the big “c” word was replaced with the big “i” word (“indentured,” that is), but that’s another story. At any rate, for the first three years of medical school the “c” word flashed on my radar screen every time I contemplated what I wanted to become once I graduated and became a real doctor. It wasn’t until my third year of medical school, though, when I left the classroom and started taking care of real people, that I was answering this vexing question: I wanted to continue taking care of real people!

Having reached that conclusion, my next step was to select a specialty. Let’s see. I loved to get my hands dirty, I loved playing in the water, and I’d always wanted to learn how to become a fixer-upper. Hmm . . . Of course, I’d become a plumber—a urologist, that is—and help people maintain their water works!

Okay, so I made it through medical school, but guess what was crouching on the doorstep waiting for me to pass through the portal into the real world? You’ve got it, another “c,” but this time my old friend was mixed up with a confusing alphabet soup of other letters including HMO, PPO, IPA, DRG and a potpourri of other tasteless morsels. Ah, but I also discovered that a healthy sprinkling of patients (and patience) could turn this alphabet soup into a gourmet meal. (And this revelation predated the “chicken soup for the soul” recipe book.)

Fast-forward a quarter of a century. I’m still swashbuckling with “c”s. In fact, my partner, Cheri Elliott and I are currently dueling with a big “c” in our professional lives. Later this year, we will be moving our practice to a brand new office building nearby. Shortly thereafter, Cheri will prepare for another major “c” as she completes her adult nurse practitioner training at UNC and joins our practice with a new song to sing. We’re really looking forward to this new chapter in our lives.

And so the adventure continues. All is in Divine order. Every morning we greet the new day by saying “Lord, what do you have for us today? Bring it on.”

In closing, based on my experience thus far, I have this piece of advice to offer: When the big “c” comes knocking at your door - open the door wide, for opportunity has arrived at your doorstep.