

A Physician Speaks from the Heart

By

Leonard J. Hoenig, M.D.

On Thanksgiving we are grateful for all of the blessings bestowed upon us: good food, a comfortable lifestyle, family and friends. There is one gift, however, that we may be overlooking. It is the gift of time.

Time is an interesting concept. In physics it defines how long it takes for an object to move between two points in space. Sir Isaac Newton thought time was an absolute, invariable measurement. Albert Einstein's special Theory of Relativity disagreed with this point. According to Einstein time is relative and may vary according to an observer's frame of reference.

In medicine, I find time to be relative. We have less time to spend with patients and time seems shorter than it ever did before. The perspective of time may change when a patient is diagnosed with a terminal illness. For this patient the shortness of time has a much different significance and every minute possesses heightened value.

The best way to think of time, however, is that it is a gift not only to us but also a gift that we can bestow upon others. When a doctor sees a patient in the office, he can turn that encounter into something special by being friendly, taking some extra time to be personal and concerned. The doctor patient relationship can be a warm one where both parties are enriched by the experience.

As we approach the holiday season, people scurry about looking for what gift to give to one another. How about giving the gift of time? Spend some time with a relative or friend you haven't called in awhile. Donate some time to a charity or worthy cause.

If we all appreciate the gift of time and share it with one another, then all of us will truly be blessed and have something wonderful for which to be thankful.