

CARSIDE MANNER



My younger daughter just returned from a week end at a summer camp at which bright young students were exposed to opportunities in the medical field. (Thank goodness

the kid takes after her mother.) At this Med Camp, these young folks were given lessons in basic anatomy, and shown many of the procedures commonly used by doctors to diagnose and cure all sorts of human ailments.

But Krista's biggest excitement had to do with the fact that the doctor guiding the tour was constantly comparing the practice of medicine to the skills needed to be a good auto repair technician.

"Whoa, Dad, you're like a doctor!"

We've often used the comparison but had it going the other way. As Doctors of Autos, we need many of a doctor's skills to heal the ailing vehicles passing through our automotive clinics.

But further thought made me wonder how a doctor would respond to some of the foolishness we hear from customers. Let's see how well the doctor would respond to the following:

• Doctor: "Mr. Smith, it seems that you have some severely clogged hoses in and around your heart. It will require a triple bypass operation to provide a permanent cure."

Customer: "I called my brother-in-law for a look-see at those x-rays you gave me. He's a plumber, Local 440. Been on the job for 34 years and never had a leak yet. He says you're full of hops. Double bypass at tops will do the job. Where do you people get off trying to overcharge me?"

• Doctor: "Well, this is a pretty little cut you've inflicted on yourself. It'll take about 12 stitches to close it up, but we'll have you on your way in a jiffy. No problem."

Customer: "I'm a little short on cash right now. Could we save a few bucks by using, oh say 10 stitches, and spacing them further apart? And don't worry about the need for a fresh set of antiseptic gloves. Maybe you could just wash your hands twice. I have a buddy in the soap business—he can get you gallons of the stuff at a discount. Ya know?"

"Hey, I just realized, I have one of those portable sewing kits in the car. You know, the ones you throw in your suitcase for a trip. Needles and thread—the

whole kit. I think there's even a spare button or two if it helps. "Whattaya say, huh Doc?"

"Doc?"

• Doctor: "Mr. Larson, you're bleeding to death. But before we start, there are a few financial statements we need you to fill out before we can proceed. If you feel faint at any time, please feel free to ask my assistant for help."

Customer: "Doc, I'm gonna level with you. The last few weeks have been a financial nightmare for me. First the VCR broke, then the darned Nintendo game became an 'I don't intend to.' My wife's hair dresser left town and she had to try out 13 new shops at 65 bucks a shot before she could find a place that could tolerate her constant prattling. And hey, let's face it, it's vacation time. You got a family, right? You understand."

"Oh yeah, and don't forget about that great sale on stereo equipment going on at Wally's Walls of Sound."

"Doc? Doc?"

• Doctor: "It seems that your constant abuse of your body has taken its toll. Smoking, drinking too much. You're 50 pounds overweight, and it's obvious that your most strenuous exercise comes from opening a refrigerator door or a can of beer."

Customer: "You wouldn't happen to have a lighter in your pocket, would you?"

• Doctor: "Mr. Jones, your wife has a life threatening disease which will require three separate surgeries, some very expensive medication, and a lengthy convalescence including regular therapy."

Customer: "Bummer. Do you have anything for this bald spot I'm growing on top of my head?"

The problem we all face is that unlike the doctor, the car and not its owner is the one who's ailing. And all jokes aside, the poor car can't tell you what hurts, can't pay its own bills, will usually be neglected, abused, and finally cursed for its failure to perform, often through no fault of its own. And the second car in the drive, the one used by the wife and kids, is often sliding around on bald tires and finally grinding to a halt 20 feet past every stop sign.

Unlike the good doctor, we always work through a third party when treating the patient vehicle, and all too often the third party finds his trusty ride so far down his list of priorities that he runs out of paper before the car gets mentioned.

Bummer.

—By Ralph Birnbaum