

Medical ministry focuses on patients as people, not problems to diagnose_100404

October 1, 2004

Posted: 10/01/04

Medical ministry focuses on patients as people, not problems to diagnose

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

SAN ANTONIO-It may sound like a cliché, but people are not patients; patients are people. And that is the heart of medical ministry, a leader in the Baylor Health Care System insists.

It is easy for doctors—even those who view their occupation as a ministry—to fall into the rut of viewing each patient as a diagnosis, said Jim Walton, senior vice president of community health in the Baylor Health Care System. Physicians want to correct physical ailments or prevent future breakdowns.

But when doctors move beyond that to uncover the life stories of their clients, ministry begins taking place, Walton said during a healthcare conference sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas Missions Equipping Center.

When the patient and the doctor begin to connect as people, each has

something to contribute to the relationship, Walton continued. Physicians are giving medical treatment, but patients also are giving of themselves.

“When you are sitting in their house, you're close,” he said. “When you're sitting in the kitchen, you're closer.”

Walton described his ministry with a paraplegic man who came to Dallas from El Salvador. He was working in this country and sending money back to his wife and three children who remained in El Salvador. When he was injured, his wife traveled to be with him.

During the two years Walton has treated the man, he has become acquainted with how the man felt so far from his children. Walton saw a family, not a patient.

The doctor uncovered his own tendency to see himself as the minister and the patient as someone in need. While that is true, Walton said, he now recognizes each patient is ministering to him as well.

Citing the biblical story of the Good Samaritan, Walton noted each person is made in the image of God and has something to give.

“Your neighbor has gifts and assets,” he said. “It isn't all about you and your sacrifice.”

Walton now is looking for a missionary in El Salvador who can care for this man. That will allow him to return to be with his children while continuing to get the help he needs.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.