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PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

Call these doctors by their calling

Physicians with names unique to medicine say they -- and patients -- have a good sense of humor about the whole thing.

By [Damon Adams](#), *AMNews* staff. Jan. 21, 2008.

After patients get a vasectomy at this practice, they walk away, albeit gingerly, with a T-shirt to mark the occasion.

"I was 'chopped' at the Urology Team," it proclaims on the back.

Both procedure and shirt come courtesy of Richard "Dick" Chopp, MD, of the Urology Team practice in Austin, Texas. The name is real, the doctor is real. And he's in on the joke.

"My patients call me Dick Chopp. They say, 'How did you get that name?' I say, 'It's mainly divine intervention.' "

During medical school or in practice, perhaps at a conference, you've heard or joked about some unlikely doctor monikers. Dr. Cure. Dr. Bones. Dr. Love. Dr. Butts. Dr. Butcher. Dr. Pepper.

Some are doctors whose names match their specialty. And these real McCoys say having a name unique to medicine is an icebreaker, gives patients a dose of levity, creates local recognition and helps the doctors keep their own sense of humor.

"It's always been fun for me. Everybody wishes they had my name," Dr. Chopp said.

But being called Looney wasn't much joy for John Looney, MD, when he was a boy in small-town Texas. When schoolchildren mocked him, he wouldn't take any guff.

"I was a boy named Sue. I'd fight you at the drop of a hat," he said.

Today, Dr. Looney is a psychiatrist who specializes in adolescent psychiatry. He

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usually doesn't hear wisecracks from his young patients. They share them with their parents before they see him. "They say, 'I ain't going to see a psychiatrist named Looney,' " said the professor of psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C.

An icebreaker

Sometimes, when Dr. Looney treats hospital patients for the first time, he uses their reaction to his name as an indication of their mood. A comment about it may reveal a good sense of humor while no response may point to a state of sadness.

When it comes to treatment, however, patients are more concerned about his skills than what he's called.

"Psychiatric patients are coming in a state of unhappiness. They really don't care if your name is Joseph Stalin as long as you can relate to them and you're warm to them," he said.

Unlike Dr. Looney, James "Jim" Hurt III, MD, hears jokes from patients firsthand.

"It's usually, 'Are you going to hurt me?' or, 'Doctor, don't hurt me,' " he said. "I probably hear something two or three times a day from nurses or patients."

But it doesn't get to him.

"In medical school, people always told me I should go into anesthesiology or pain medicine," said Dr. Hurt, an orthopedic surgery resident at the University of Florida College of Medicine Jacksonville. "You can let it get on your nerves or you can go with the flow."

Actually, being Dr. Hurt isn't that painful. "It's a beneficial thing because people remember me. I really only have to give my name once," he said. "No one has ever requested another doctor because of my name."

About two or three times a month, ob-gyn Thomas Payne, MD, receives a verbal jab from husbands trying to lighten the mood in the exam room.

"The hardest thing is to try to laugh and make them think they're the first one to say something," said Dr. Payne of Ochsner Clinic Foundation in Baton Rouge, La. "I tell them my first name is Less."

No new jokes

He's heard jokes most of his life. In his youth, other children needled him as being a pain in the, ahem, behind. No patients or colleagues are that brazen, at least not to his face.

"They might think it, but they don't say it," Dr. Payne said. "The only thing worse than being an ob-gyn would be a dentist with this name."

Or maybe a retina surgeon called Dr. Blinder?

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"I always kid around about it. I say, 'You won't forget my name,' " said Kevin Blinder, MD, a retina surgeon in St. Louis and associate professor at Washington University School of Medicine. "Some patients laugh, so it's a good icebreaker."

But one mentor during training wanted Dr. Blinder to change his moniker before he would publish research with him. Dr. Blinder never blinked an eye.

"My father would have been upset at changing my name," he said.

That hasn't stopped others from suggesting he change it to something with a positive ring for an eye surgeon: Dr. Seemore.

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