

## Three and a half minutes

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I arrived at work late in the morning due to worse-than-usual traffic. I always like having a few minutes in the office before my patients arrive, but by the time I got there today, my first 2 patients were in rooms and one more was checking in with our receptionist. Great. I try to run my office as close to on-time as I can, and my patients are used to this.

I was working through my morning when I saw Ms. A. She is 62 years old, moved to a smaller city an hour outside Toronto 2 years ago, but continues to see me every 6 months for blood pressure checks, medication renewal and some minor other issues along the way. When I asked her how she was and what was new since the last time I saw her, she pulled out a tablet and said "I never feel I have anything too interesting to report to you. I've recently taken up nature photography and I put together a slide show of my most interesting pictures from this year to show you. It's three and a half minutes long".

Three and a half minutes?

Who has three and a half minutes to look at slides of nature in the middle of a busy clinic?!

I briefly thought of options for my response:

- That's great- pick the top 3 pictures and let's see them now!
- I'd love to see them. Can you send me a link that I can look at later when I'm at home?
- Terrific- while this slide show is going on, tell me about your concerns today. Let's multi-task!
- So sorry- I just don't have time today. Next time we'll book a longer appointment for this for sure!

But of course, I didn't say any of these things.

I smiled, sat back and said, "Sure, let's look at this together".

So, we sat there together as pictures came on to her screen. Pictures of forests and bridges and lakes. Pictures of frogs and close-ups of insects. They were very good and many of them had a story behind where she took the picture and why. She spoke softly as the pictures changed. I found myself slowing down mentally, feeling calmer. After what must have been three and half minutes, the first picture came up again and I realized that we had gone through all of them. I found myself a bit disappointed it was over. I thanked her for putting this together for me to see, addressed the issues of her visit and she left.

After this patient visit, my clinic seemed smoother. I felt generally more relaxed. That slide show had a calming effect on the rest of my day.

I thought about this later that evening. Taking the time to sit, take a few breaths and focus on something

unrelated to medicine somehow adjusted the lens for the remainder of my day.

And to think this 'intervention' took only three and a half minutes!