

“Perry and I Used to Say That We Had Spent Our Adult Lives Caring for Others, But Now That We Needed Care it Was Not What We Expected.”

**Rowena Nadig, R.N.,
Widow of Perry Nadig, M.D.**

Perry Nadig was born in Philadelphia, PA, and attended Tufts College in Boston. Following internship and residency in surgery at Yale Medical Center, he served two years in the U.S. Army in Eritrea, then completed his training in Urology at the University of Kansas. He practiced Urology in San Antonio where he was Associate Professor of Urology at University of Texas San Antonio Health Science Center and developed a vacuum erection device for management of impotence. He died after a six-month illness in 1997.

It has been 40 years since I started my professional life as a nurse and wife of a doctor. Prior to that I had worked as a nurses' aide and a student nurse. In other words, all my adult life has been spent providing medical care to others. Perry and I used to say that we had spent our adult lives caring for others, but now that we needed care it was not what we expected.

To begin with, when you call for an appointment you are likely to get voice mail and they will call you back, which is fine for them. I want to see the doctor! If I am going to make an appointment I have to wait at home for the nurse to call back to learn why I want to contact the doctor and then she states when he can see me. I sit and twiddle my thumbs for a few hours although I have other things to do and I don't just sit home all day. This doctor is a personal friend, but the rules of the clinic he works for dictate that this is the way everyone is treated. If I need to cancel an appointment, it is the same process; my time is valuable also. If I don't wait for the call, it becomes phone tag and it starts all over again.

Over the six months when Perry was ill, at least ten different specialists saw him. If it was a weekend we never knew who it would be. If it isn't a group of three or four doctors, it is a group of 10 to 50, and I felt the covering doctor was not up on everything that was happening. Perry had good doctors but they could not do their best because they might be covering five or six hospitals on the weekend. It could be 25 miles from one end of the list to the other. In case of an emergency, the doctor just could not get there. We waited until our turn on the list came up. It left me very anxious and feeling helpless.

To add to that problem, the new graduate nurses need at least six months of hospital work to be able to make decisions on when to call the doctor and what to tell him. Hospitals like new nurses because they are less expensive but if there is only one experienced nurse on duty, the quality of care suffers.

On three occasions I had to call the supervisor to have her come do an assessment and have the nurse call the doctor. Remember that I am a graduate nurse who is not afraid to speak her mind. What is an ordinary family member supposed to do to get required care? On Perry's first admission I actually lived at the hospital to provide his care.

I think we have some very good young doctors but the system interferes with their

work. If the doctor could spend enough time with the patient to know what is going on in the patient's life, which might be contributing to the problem, we might need fewer tests. There would certainly be better rapport with the patient and family and perhaps fewer lawsuits.

Modern technology can do much that couldn't be done 45 years ago for which we are all grateful. Yet I see this carried to extremes with many an unnecessary test being done. Every week on television we hear of another new drug that is going to save thousands of lives. Pardon me, but we are all going to die, some sooner, some later. Let us die with dignity. I don't have to have a test or procedure done just because it is available. When I refuse to open my mouth to eat because life has become a burden, please don't place a gastrostomy feeding tube in me.

Perry was fortunate to be able to practice with a small group as long as he was working. He took time to know his patients. He was always willing to listen to them and never had a malpractice suit.