

## Lessons from Motorcycle Riding for Life in the Clinic

I recently took a motorcycle riding course\* and one of the key messages was "the bike will go where you look." If you look at the object you are trying to avoid, you will inadvertently steer right into it. That means, if you look at the pothole, you'll find yourself in the pothole.

The key is to "keep your head up and look at where you are going or want to go". Keeping your head up, looking for the better route is what keeps you safe and on target.

This is a perfect metaphor for a common problem in healthcare....focusing on the frustrations of what is going wrong, instead of focusing on what needs to be done differently.

Examples:

- A conversation goes poorly between an MA and a provider, the focus is on who did what wrong (the pothole), instead of the more productive option of "what problem are we trying to solve and how can we have a productive conversation about it?"
- A group of hospital nurses and surgeons are in a meeting trying to address the problem of patients not getting the information they need regarding their procedures and the majority of the meeting is spent trying to pin the blame on who is most at fault (the pothole) instead of the more productive option of "how can our patients get the information they need, when they need it."

When we worry, complain, criticize, and stress out, we are diving right into an emotional pothole. It is a pothole that delivers nothing of actual value and can take a great deal of time to climb out of.

When we lift our heads out of the pothole, look further down the road to what it is that we are actually trying to achieve....then decisions start to be made, action steps begin to occur and a new future begins to be realized.

Here is a sample conversation to illustrate this idea:

*RN: You can't believe what happened today? Pat just blew up in my face.*

*Leader: Can you tell me what happened?*

*RN: A group of people were standing around socializing and I asked them to get back to work. The next thing I know, Pat is standing there yelling at me telling me that I have no right to tell anybody what to do. I'm not ever going to say something to her ever again. She is mean and impossible to work with.*

Leader: I'm sorry that happened to you. Ideally, how would you like a conversation like that to go?

*RN: That people would be polite and friendly when asked to get back to work.*

Leader: So ideally, you would feel comfortable speaking up, and people would respond in a welcoming manner. Is that right?

*RN: Yes, but that will never happen. Some people are just rude.*

Leader: Look, I think this is an important problem, and I don't think it is just isolated to this incident or one person. How do you feel about bringing this challenge into the next team meeting? I'd like the team to strategize what it will take to have people feeling comfortable speaking up and getting a positive response in return. In the meeting, we would not be debriefing the particular incident you experienced, but rather focusing on future situations that involve people asking for help or asking their co-workers to refocus on their work.

*RN: Okay, but I don't think it will solve all of our problems.*

Leader: I know it won't solve all of our problems; however, I believe the best way to get to someplace different is to focus on where we want to be. I'd like to do that with this problem because it is an important one to resolve.

The next time you are in a meeting at your clinic, and the energy and focus seems to be swirling around in a pothole of disappointment and frustration, consider asking the group to Stop, Lift their heads up and Think about where they are trying to go. It might give the group the redirection they need, because you go where you look.

\*Basic Rider Training, Team Oregon Motorcycle Safety Program.  
<http://teamoregon.orst.edu>