



## what hippocrates knew

by Joan Fox

Hippocrates is not someone quoted in business literature or on the news. Would we remember him at all if it weren't for the famous oath bearing his name? Would he be one of our thought leaders if he were now a practicing physician? Would we heed his legendary words with the passion to make them come to life every single moment?

“Using technology to enhance patient outcomes does not have to come at the high price of depersonalization.”

These words taken from the Hippocratic Oath, “I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon’s knife or the chemist’s drug” were articulated in a different time. Are these old, almost sacred, words still relevant? Was sympathy something we offered long ago because we couldn’t “fix” something or someone’s body? Since these words were first uttered, our world has become vastly different. The products of the admirable human mind have not only improved our abilities and solutions but have transformed life itself.

In this technological era it is easy to dismiss the ideas of the past, portraying them as “nice” but not practical anymore. Wisdom, however, is in using the technology we now have to enhance what we know in our hearts to be true. Just because an idea is old does not make it passé, and just because an idea is new does not make

it desirable. Just because technology can make us more efficient doesn’t mean that we must employ it. But once we are convinced of the value to the organization of implementing new efficiency tools, it is our responsibility to use them in a way that is also of value to those we serve as healthcare providers.

Take the EMR (electronic medical records) technology or patient call centers as examples. Used successfully by similar organizations, they were introduced to enhance efficiency. Predictable responses to these as well as other new tools, processes, or technology are the refrains of “push back.” Heartfelt cries that we are building barriers between us and the patient, that we are impersonalizing our services, and that we are creating even more distance between the human beings we serve and their providers are authentic signs of caring.

But using technology to enhance patient outcomes does not have to come at the high price of depersonalization. Explaining new technologies to patients can actually improve the patient experience. Yes, things have changed, and the challenge is to improve the patient interaction in spite of the efficiency technologies that are now our norm. If we allow the technological advances to reduce the “warmth, sympathy, and understanding” prescribed by Hippocrates himself, we have lost our way. His words are not outdated; they have never been more relevant.

