

ONE PERSON TOO MANY™

Because being truthful comes at a cost

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He Thought It Was Just an Abscess

***"a general surgeon and a plastic surgeon
are the only people who have seen
my wounds before"***

That's what Mr. C said the first time he sat in front of me — twenty-three years old, leaning carefully to one side because the pain had already reshaped the way he moved. He'd been told for years that he simply had "another abscess." Another prescription. Another wound, and another clinical consultation. With Me.

But when I examined him, it was obvious this was something far more severe. Multiple open wounds spread across the bilateral buttock area and sacrum, tunneling tracks that connected his wounds with proximity to bony structures and his perineum. Green, viscous, odorous, drainage leaked from the open wounds, and I suspected multiple fistulae were present too.

This wasn't an abscess; this was
Hidradenitis Suppurativa.

What struck me immediately wasn't only the severity of his disease — it was the impact it had on his sense of self.

This was a young man who had never been able to be fully intimate with anyone. This is a young man who avoided people and relationships. This is a young man who

didn't understand what was happening to him, and assumed it was his fault. This is a young man who trusted me enough to witness his experience.

He cried throughout the assessment, disclosing the past 4 years of shame, and embarrassment, isolation, depression, and despair. And that trust mattered.

It allowed me to understand how I could help him.

What he taught me is that when nothing seems to work and all else fails, a simple gesture of validation can offer hope.

Engaging him in a conversation about smoking cessation was a key piece of information that allowed him to reclaim some control over his condition and allowed us to develop a plan together.

He carried the physical pain, yes — but he also carried the isolation, the embarrassment, the erosion of self-esteem that comes with being passed off, passed over, or referred elsewhere.

Mr. C made a statement during our encounter that has stuck with me.

He told me that, *“a general surgeon and a plastic surgeon are the only people who have seen my wounds before you”*.

His body told a story long before anyone paid attention. What did he NOT say when he went to the doctor? What did they NOT ask while he was there? Why would they NOT examine him? And most concerning to me was HOW MANY appointments did this young man go to before he came to see me? I was embarrassed to ask....and so I never did.

But when he finally felt seen, he let himself be helped — and that is where healing began. He stopped smoking completely after our second visit. It took over three years to finally heal Mr. C.

A tremendous amount of effort, collaboration was poured into this young man, but it was well worth it.

If you have lived through something similar...or have a story to tell - Share it, so someone else is seen