

table lessons

BY DOUGLAS NELSON

YOU AND I BOTH KNOW

After a long day seeing too many clients in my clinic, I met my wife for a bite to eat and a glass of wine at a local restaurant. Having been in my community for many years, I often see my clients when I am out in public. But tonight was one of those nights where a quiet conversation with my wife and a nice meal was all I wanted.

Just as we sat down in a secluded corner of the restaurant, a client who I had noticed kept motioning for me to come over to her table. I apologized to my wife and asked her to order for me. As I walked over to the table to say hello, the conversation went quickly from various pleasantries to lateral epicondylitis. (It is funny how that happens!) As she asked me more questions about the condition, its causes and treatment, I realized some of the questions seemed more hypothetical than detail-specific.

Finally, it hit me, and I turned to address her husband, who hadn't said a word. "This isn't about your wife is it? This is really about you, correct?"

The husband nodded rather sheepishly. "It's not really that bad, just a little tender," he said.

"Just a little tender? Are you kidding me?" she asked. "This morning you dropped the pillow while making the bed. If you can't lift a pillow, it is a little more than tender."

That statement was followed by what seemed to be an endless pause, with him staring at her, while she glanced at me, and I stared back at her husband. Meanwhile, I just wanted to get back to my food, which had just been delivered to my table and was getting colder by the minute. The husband, who happens to be a physician, did not know what to say.

"Well, you and I both know why my arm hurts," he said to me.

"You and I both know ..." is one of those statements that drives me nuts. I don't think I have ever had someone say that to me when I actually did know whatever it was I supposedly already knew.

He waited for me to respond, but I have learned that sometimes the best response is no response at all. When it was clear that I was not going to take the bait, he shared his insight (which I supposedly already knew!).

"I am 69 years old," he said.

At this point, I was lamenting that my food was room temperature, my wife annoyed, and a great glass of cabernet stood untouched. It took me a minute to concoct a response. After a moment to ponder, I decided to go a different direction. If I get to play the interlocutor, at least I can have some fun.

"I see; that makes sense, I suppose. By the way, which arm is bothering you?" I asked.

"The right," he replied. His tone implied that he was pleased I had accepted his explanation and his wife would possibly stop bugging him about his condition.

Looking him in the eye, I then studiously turned my gaze to his right arm while nodding in agreement. With this, he seemed to be quite pleased. From an intent scrutiny of his right arm, I turned my gaze back to his eyes and then to his left arm.

"One question," I said. "Just curious, but how old is your left arm?"


I left the question in the air, savoring the look in his eyes when he realized the fallacy of his reasoning. His mouth moved, but he couldn't think of anything to say. When you are already in a hole, it is best to stop digging.

"Here is my card," I said. "Call me if you decide to have some treatment on your arm."

I went back to my food; he and his wife sat there, her looking at him, and he looking at the floor.

"What was that all about?" my wife asked as I returned to the table.

"You and I both know, people don't always make sense," I said. She gave me that I-love-you, but-sometimes-you're-a-little-nuts look. **m&b**

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