

# Treating the Patient, Not the Disease

*As told by  
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**I was not on service at the time that one of my AIDS patients came into the hospital.** I had known him for a number of years and seen him through a number of crises. He ended up seeing one of the Infectious Disease Consultants (IDC). Later that day I got a phone call from the IDC fellow who said my patient was very depressed, wanted to stop dialysis, and go home and die. The IDC asked me to come see the patient.

So I went and asked my patient what was going on. He had just had a dialysis access put in his arm in addition to the implanted I.V. catheter port in his chest. He also had a line in another vessel for dialysis. Unfortunately, septic emboli were coming off one of those lines into his lungs, and the other doctors were telling him that the port had to come out of his chest.

Having this port was incredibly important for him, and he didn't want to lose it. It had seen him through an episode of lymphoma and all his draws for blood tests so he didn't have to be stuck in a vein every time. To make matters worse, he had had his gallbladder out recently and just before that his kidneys failed. Needless to say, he was very discouraged. With all of these things going wrong, losing that port was like the last straw.

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The big lesson for me was learning the difference between treating the disease and treating the human being.

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