

Comments on 'The Language Game'



To the Editor:

I enjoyed reading the commentary by Drs. Mangione, Mandell, and Post¹ regarding the use of the word “provider,” and its contribution to the degradation of physician professionalism, with resultant burnout. I’m writing to contribute a couple of historical perspectives.

In days of yore, it was common for physicians who worked 5 days per week to devote 1 afternoon each week to volunteer health care at a public health clinic. It was also common for physicians to provide free health care to fellow physicians and their immediate families. (The latter practice, which was considered an honor as well as a cherished duty, was driven out by the rise of private health insurance. Other than for financial hardship, other such perks are considered insurance fraud).

Volunteer care reinforced the sense of mission, which is at the core of all health care. Providing free care to fellow physicians promoted the sense of community and collegiality (whether it’s ethical to provide financial breaks to people not in need is a different issue).

It’s obvious that we’re not going to return to ancient systems of health care. Nevertheless, it’s my humble suggestion that promoting mission, collegiality, and community can help to combat physician burnout.

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Reference

1. Mangione S, Mandell BF, Post SG. The language game: we are physicians, not providers. *Am J Med* 2021;134(12):1444–6.

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