



No, thank *YOU*

By Benjamin Barankin, MD


Once, in the exam room of the clinic, I found a young man named T.J. sitting sullen with his shirt off. As I glanced at the significant scarring acne on his chest and face, I naively asked what had brought him to clinic. He snidely commented, "What do you think?"

T.J. told me he came to the clinic monthly to have comedones extracted on his back. I glanced at his back and realized he needed much more than comedone extraction. Flipping through his chart, I saw that T.J. had tried all the usual therapies, including isotretinoin, but he still had numerous comedones and deep nodules and cysts on his chest, face, and back.

I asked T.J. if I could take some pictures of him for my records. He whispered under his breath, "At least someone doesn't mind looking at me."

I appreciated some of the psychosocial impact associated with psoriasis and other skin diseases, but had yet to see the impact of severe acne. As I snapped some pictures, I asked T.J. how his acne had affected his life. He said he had stopped playing hockey because his large and deep pimples would hurt and often bleed when he was body-checked.

Noticing that T.J. and I were bonding, as much as a brief clinic visit would allow, I asked him, "How are things with the ladies?" He answered back, "The last time a girl spoke to me she asked me why I don't wash my face or get my acne treated." He then told me he had thought of taking his life, but that his parents and siblings had been so supportive, he didn't want to let them down. He said there was too much to live for; he wanted to become a famous musician. I was impressed. Before me sat a young man that faced severe, disfiguring acne at such a young age, and yet, he was optimistic.

He asked me whether I could offer him any other treatments. I mentioned a few new topical treatments and told him that with our rate of progress on acne and scarring research, we should have better options available for him in the near future. He appeared content and thanked me for spending so much time with him and for making him feel better about the future. Although I appreciated his gratitude, I had to respond, "No, thank you." 

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