

A cup of soup



Illustration by Claire Gilmore

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Standing in the cafeteria line of Thomas Jefferson University Hospital I noticed one of our medical students also in line holding a cup of soup. As has been my tradition for students, I went up the student, bought her soup for her, smiled, and went on my way.

Several days later, a letter appeared in my bin. In it was a hand-written note from this student. It read as follows:

When you bought my soup for me you said 'it was nothing;' but your act of kindness reached so much further than my rumbling stomach. When you addressed me, I was thinking about the family of my patient in the NICU. They were gathered and grieving, trying to make the decision to withdraw care from a young man who was a son, brother, husband, and father of two young children. I am part of a team that had medically managed his herniations from cerebral edema within the past 24 hours; and felt frustrated at the communication boundaries between the medical team and the family. Holding my soup, I was wondering how compassion was defined or practiced in a critical care setting. Your gesture so poignantly reminded me that reaching out and creating a connection is the most

fundamental thing I could do for this family. After lunch, I approached the family and asked if there was anything they needed. They initially replied no but several hours later the wife asked me to help them find a way to donate organs. I contacted Gift of Life and stayed with them for the family discussion witnessing their compassion even in a time of grief. I feel so blessed to be a link in this network of compassion and kindness and thank you deeply for reaching out and reminding me of this. Thank you for teaching me the intangible lessons.

In the thus far 38 years I have been teaching medical students I have humbly received many such notes from medical students that I treasure and have kept. What has impressed me is that the majority of the students' commentaries did not focus primarily on clinical learning experiences but on the intangible qualities of a physician that they observed not only on the floors but also in brief meetings or in chance encounters.

Decades after graduating medical school, former students have told me that these same observations and impressions have continued to influence and guide their professional lives and positively influence their role as teachers.

When we take the Oath of Hippocrates, physicians also assume the mantle of teacher. That commitment to teaching should weigh as heavily in the minds and hearts of doctors as that of patient care and of research. We physicians alone hold the future, the quality, the perpetuation of traditions, the humanistic qualities, and the Oslerian values of medicine. That sacred duty of teaching, the passing on of these attributes, both tangible and intangible, has risen to critical importance in today's world where societal and economic forces seek to change the very framework on which medicine has been founded and practiced.

The physician's role as teacher is not fulfilled by masterful PowerPoint presentations; nor is the physician as teacher defined solely by dutifully making masterful team rounds with medical students and residents. In its purest sense, the physician as teacher is the unwavering acceptance and dedication to the principle that it is a vocation for developing the next generation of physicians. It is a 24-hour dedication to the ideals of humanism, compassion, and professionalism not only in the care of patients but in the manner in which we live both our professional and private lives, and interact both inside and outside academic and clinical settings.

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In Memoriam

Martin Davis (ΑΩΑ, University of Tennessee, 1944) passed away in January 2019.

Laurence T. Crimmins (ΑΩΑ, Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University, 1963) passed away January 4, 2019.

James E. Fragetta (ΑΩΑ, University of Tennessee Health Science Center, 1990) passed away January 6, 2019.

Kendrick Mason Howard, Jr. (ΑΩΑ, University of Colorado, 1962) passed away January 12, 2019.

Michael L. Graybeal (ΑΩΑ, Sidney Kimmel Medical College, 1979) passed away February 6, 2019.

Edward Rubenstein (ΑΩΑ, University of Cincinnati, 1946) passed away March 11, 2019.

Bernard W. Fong (ΑΩΑ, Sidney Kimmel Medical College, 1951) passed away March 13, 2019.

J. David E. Street (ΑΩΑ, University of Kansas, 1996) passed away March 18, 2019.

Philip D. Cleveland (ΑΩΑ, University of Washington, 1966) passed away on March 30, 2019.

John R. Flatt (ΑΩΑ, Northwestern University, 1952) passed away April 15, 2019.

Lois T. Ellison (ΑΩΑ, Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University, 1974) passed away April 20, 2019.

Claude C. Reeck, Jr. (ΑΩΑ, Indiana University, 1969) passed away May 12, 2019.

William Lynn Weaver (ΑΩΑ, Meharry Medical College, 1991, Faculty) passed away May 25, 2019.

Edward Joseph Kirby (ΑΩΑ, New York Medical College, 1981) passed away June 2, 2019.

Romaine Bendixen (ΑΩΑ, University of Iowa, 1962) passed away June 6, 2019.

Keith F. Harcourt (ΑΩΑ, Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine, 1961) passed away June 20, 2019.

Michael Dean Parker (ΑΩΑ, Duke University School of Medicine, 1968) passed away June 24, 2019.

Donald Traicoff (ΑΩΑ, Indiana University, 1964) passed away June 29, 2019.

Stephen C. Ross (ΑΩΑ, Boston University School of Medicine, 1972) passed away July 18, 2019.

Thomas F. Ferris (ΑΩΑ, Yale University School of Medicine, 1956) passed away July 19, 2019.

James F. Panzer (ΑΩΑ, University of Nebraska, 1965) passed away July 28, 2019.

Alan Hunstock (ΑΩΑ, Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine, 1976) passed away August 12, 2019.

Theodore J. Kowalshyn (ΑΩΑ, MCP Hahnemann (Allegheny University), 1965) passed away August 14, 2019.