



Perspectives

The pleasure of lifelong learning

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Pleasure is not a word usually used to describe the intense academic effort of medical school, but learning and expanding one's mind does bring pleasure: "a gratification of the mind; or as the excitement, relish, or happiness produced by enjoyment; a thing which gives delight and satisfaction; or that which pleases."¹

At times, in each of our careers, we believe that our knowledge of medicine is at its peak. But only with a lifelong commitment to learning do we grow and develop a capacity to integrate our knowledge, skills, and attitudes. And, if we are lucky, we gain wisdom and humility, the ability to see the whole picture and incorporate our experience into the big picture, and arrive at a global insight into our disciplines that can only be derived from years of experience and careful mentoring and learning from colleagues. In the active learning process needed to find and maintain competence, you will also find the pleasure of learning.



What are the pleasurable attributes of lifelong learning?

Be curious: Your curiosity got you here and will lead you on. Don't put it aside because of the daily pressures of your job. Satisfying your curiosity can add zest to your life. Think about these suggestions for enhancing your appreciation for lifelong learning.

Have integrity: The honest recognition of what you know, what you don't know, and what you need to find out will help you in your interactions with patients, parents, grandparents, nurses, colleagues, and other members of the health care team. The gratification of knowing what you need to know or finding it out if you don't know are part of the pleasure of learning.

Discover your learning style: Some of us learn from grand rounds, some from tapes, some from reading journals, some from reviewing journal articles, some from CME courses. You can learn in a library, a hospital auditorium, at a microscope, by perusing PubMed or Google in your office, home, or on an airplane. You are free to choose to learn by whatever works best for you. Finding your own learning style is a discovery, a delight, and provides you with a learning tool for all your adult life.

Acquire and evaluate information and learn about informatics: Knowledge in medicine is ever-expanding. This is one of the reasons for lifelong learning. We can no longer base our decisions on our own limited experiences. Biomedical research, clinical research studies and drug trials, and the results of the Human Genome Project must all be part of the things about which we need to know more. And more than just knowing the results, we also need to know how the results were obtained and interpreted. Gaining an insight into these techniques gives powerful access to this new knowledge. Much of our ability to define "clinical outcomes" and "evidence-based medicine" relates to the use of informatics, in which mathematical equations can be rapidly solved. Tapping into these informatic approaches allows one to become a better physician while satisfying curiosity.

Embrace the humanities: Arts show us humanity and the human condition, and, in a fundamental sense, medicine deals with humanity and the human condition. Thus literature, drama, and art should be components of your lifelong education, because insight into the human condition will both make you a better doctor and give you great pleasure. It may be that a traditional liberal education is the best possible preparation for medical school.

Become a teacher: Now and in the future, you will be a teacher: a teacher of patients and families, as well as of students, residents, fellows, and colleagues. The successful teacher both loves to teach and loves to learn.

Achieve the abilities of self-assessment and self-awareness: Learning requires self-assessment. In essence, and with apologies to Ralph Waldo Emerson, I contend that lifelong learning includes the learning process, self-assessment, resiliency, self-reliance, and, ultimately, happiness.

I encourage you to embrace the concept of lifelong learning and its components: Be curious, have integrity, develop your learning style, acquire and evaluate information and learn about informatics, embrace the humanities, become a teacher, and achieve the abilities of self-assessment and self-reliance. May the rewards and the pleasure of lifelong learning be with you all your days.

Reference

1. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield (MA): G&C Merriam; 1977. p 882.

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