

# Letter to the editor

## Daily devotion

Physicians are not immune to the medical illnesses they treat and unfortunately are at higher risk for a number of ailments and their consequences ranging from alcoholism, drug dependence, and suicide. The growing stress that physicians incur from the practice of medicine is akin to a psychological plaque that is competing for the soul of medicine and diminishing our age-old mandate of knowing and caring for our patients.

How do we therapeutically address these problems that gnaw away at our cherished position in society and diminish our value as true professionals?

The horrid pace of the practice of medicine has altered the doctor's and the public's perception of what it means to be a doctor. In past years, physicians were viewed in many cases as extended members of the family and, if not that centrally connected, at least as part of the extended family community. With physicians often unable to spend time to build those personal bridges that connect human to human, our worth and society's respect for the physician has waned, much like the recent value of our mutual funds in

the stock market. Once again, how did this happen? Some would say that the pressure to see more patients in a time of declining reimbursement and the mountain of paperwork that must be completed each day have created impediments for thoughtful nurturing behavior needed to fully develop the doctor-patient relationship.

In years past, there were visionary medical leaders/writers like Francis Peabody, J. Willis Hurst, Sir William Osler, John H. Stone, and others, whose values and inspirational writings helped to keep us sane and on course. I believe writers like these icons have unique insights and answers on the inner workings of the melancholy physician heart. I would profess that with the challenges medicine faces, we need to revisit the writings of current and past physician/writers for daily inspiration. As some doctors read the scriptures in the morning to find solace in a troubled spiritual world, we need similar "daily devotions" to inspire us to handle the daily stressors and obstructions to better patient care. It is only when we try to exceed the current minimalist expectations and provide patients with knowing and caring treatment that we actually reach the goals and standards that we set for ourselves

at the start of the long journey to become competent physicians.

Certainly, there are other forces at play that continue to challenge our ability to stay on the road to physician wellness for the greater good of our patients' health; but let us not diminish the power of positive thinking and the cogent lessons of self-regulation that are fortified by effort and faith.

In conclusion, it does require a daily devotion of words imbued with the wisdom of Richard Selzer, Eugene Stead, Lewis Thomas, and others who entreat us to exceed the norm and connect to our patients in ways that show that we "know and care." For it is only by completing the avalanche of paperwork, the elongated phone calls to obtain clearance to perform tests, resolving claim denials, and other seemingly perfunctory tasks, that we can ultimately serve our patients. These obstructions and other challenges to the sanctity of medicine can only then be viewed as a means to an end—*the best care for our patients*.

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