

# The Art of Doctoring – Inspiring a Generation

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The completion of medical training and the start of a career is one of the great transitions in a physician's life. It is a time for reflection, a time for pride and satisfaction, and a time for new challenges. The following is my contribution given as the commencement address chosen by the graduating students of the 2013 class at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. It is my attempt to summate what I have learned about the art of doctoring and to challenge them to fulfill the promise and possibility of their talents, their efforts, and their inspiration.

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It is a great honor to be here. This is truly wonderful. As a teacher, I've often said that of all the days of the year, this is the best because it marks your accomplishment. All of you as an extended family. And that you share it with us—your teachers—that's inspiring. And indeed, inspiring doctors is exactly what I'm talking about today. But first—a teacher's confession: All of you in the front row—remember the Krebs cycle? I don't either. The back row—remember all those mnemonics you used to help yourself get through anatomy class? They don't work in the operating room. It is a bit of a dilemma. You thought you came to school to be taught medi-

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cine, but Oscar Wilde claimed that nothing truly worth knowing can be taught. Indeed there might be a bit of truth to this. Look at politics. Arguably our greatest president and certainly our most eloquent, Abraham Lincoln, was also our least educated. Scholars think he had at least 6 months of total education. So what was the last 4 years

that doctoring is hard work, that you work too many hours—but never believe it. Whether it's me taking a brain tumor out of a child in sub-Saharan Africa, or my colleagues working to stop a resistant bacteria from becoming the world's next plague, or a generation of doctors trying to influence their patients to take control of their health to stop the modern plagues

You will be teachers for all of your patients, and you must be. But the role of a teacher in medicine goes beyond individual patients. You must also teach yourself and your peers.

about? Certainly it was not about mnemonics. It was about inspiring you to discover this thing that we call the art of doctoring. It is what Yeats called "lighting a fire, not filling a pail." It is a lifelong discovery. It may seem odd for a neurosurgeon to talk doctoring. Neurosurgeons are supposed to carry an ego so large it requires a wheelbarrow to follow them on rounds, but I think people that know my career know that it has been spent trying to bring down those barriers. I have been at this attempt to discover for myself this art of doctoring for 40 years. I hope I never stop. So let me share with you some of the lessons that I have learned myself and hope you find similar ones in your continuing education in this doctoring.

First: Great doctors are in love with their jobs. Your college classmates may tell you

of obesity and diabetes, it all starts with the patient before you who has a need and you care enough about them to do the best for them. When you do, the hours fall away and you are fully engaged in your life, and in this field you must be. You see, as students you observe, you practice, you're protected—but now, from this day forth Doctors (what a wonderful title, "Doctors"), patients will put their lives, their happiness, and their future in your hands. Great doctors are truly engaged.

Second: Great doctors are creative. Be proud of what you have learned; be proud of the techniques and practices you know. But also be totally dissatisfied with them. When the patient is before you, then nothing we do for cancer, heart disease, or Alzheimer's is good enough. I do not want you to treat me with the techniques of my professors. I do not want

you to treat my children with the techniques that I taught you—I want you to surpass me. I want you to be agents of disruptive change, not settle for just what you know so far—I want you to create a better way. This is true in all fields. Look in music. At one time, American music was dominated by something called “Dixieland” and the leader of that was a man named King Oliver, impossibly rich and famous; clearly his fame would live forever. But he mentored a 16-year-old reform school kid. He gave him a cornet, taught him music, and when Louis Armstrong played, music was never the same and the teacher was surpassed and forgotten. You need to have scientific curiosity. You need to know you can do research and show creativity. Don’t be afraid of research. Be it DNA or clinical outcomes research, you can do it. I don’t have a PhD, but I will soon have 30 years of NIH funding because when I go to my clinic, my patients ask, “How is your research going Doc?” because they know I’m working on their problem.

Third: Great doctors are teachers. This is my favorite part. Do you know what “Doctor” means? It is from the Latin “docēre,” which means teacher. You must be teachers of your patients if you wish them to take charge of their health. A great teacher knows it’s never about what they said or what material they covered. It’s what the student heard and understood. I cannot tell a patient that I’m going to go into their brain, repair a leaking blood vessel, and come out and expect to have their trust if they cannot understand what I say. You will be teachers for all of your patients, and you must be. But the role of a teacher in medicine goes beyond individual patients. You must also teach yourself and your peers. You must learn and grow if you are to create and change or the world will pass you by. And you must teach your fellow doctors. For me this was made so apparent by 1 person, 1 day, 1 place—it was a great gift for me to see. I was working in the mountains of Guatemala during the time of their civil war. I had taken care of some hundred patients that day, and as I entered the courtyard at evening, I saw a young child selling fruit. I sought permission to photograph her and that picture hangs in my office where I look at it often. Because on that day I thought, who will take care of her when in the

future she is sick and I’m not here? That day I became a teacher of doctors because we need you to go to the places we will never visit—to treat the patients we will never see, and in doing so, they will teach you.

Fourth: Great doctors have integrity. We all know the icons of Schweitzer, of Paul Farmer, of Lincoln. He fought to the death for the rights of man even though his namesake was murdered by Native Americans. He himself as a youth was attacked by slaves who attempted to murder him, but he treated people as he saw was right. But I am not talking about icons. I am talking about the true meaning of integrity. It is from the Latin for “whole.” It means you are true to the complete mission. You don’t treat the brain and forget the heart, the kidney, the social problems, or a patient’s very access to health care. You show integrity by treating the whole patient and by realizing the need to continually improve, to be creative, to serve, to teach—and to care for yourself, because how you treat your whole person is all about your integrity as a doctor as well.

Treating yourself is the root of the final and most important lesson: Great doctors are great people. I’ve always observed that great doctors really like people. I’ve never seen it work the other way around. And when it’s true, none of this is hard work. You are able to serve because you’ve taken time to develop yourself as a person and hold true to the values that brought you to medicine in the first place in a world of conflict, bureaucracy and greed (be careful of greed!). And how do you do that? By having a value system you compare to for everything you do. It is a very individual thing, but I will share with you what I value. For me it is faith, family, and patients.

Faith or moral code may be formal or informal, but it is a guide to find the right path for you. It is something to help you make sense of a world where people in Boston place bombs at the feet of children. But what I saw immediately after the explosion gives me faith and inspires me: medical personnel rushed into the blast area to give aid, while police said there may be a third bomb.

Next is family. You decide how you define that. It could be a very nontraditional family; it

could be a family of colleagues. But these are people you hold close, people in whom you can confide, people with whom you are safe, people who make you laugh when you so need to. Hold them dear. Do nothing to lose that.

Finally, most obvious is patients—the people that bring it all into focus, the true source of that inspiration and your best teachers. They inspire you to create, to teach yourself to develop your whole person, and to be in love with what you do.

I still believe in the essential goodness of men and women. It has always been about how you treat people. From the patient, to the cleaning lady you pass every day, to the CEO. You acknowledge them; you get down to their level and you listen. You explain so that they can understand, and you will inspire me. You are embarking on the greatest of professions. Cushing called it the “divine vocation,” this art of doctoring. Now go and inspire others every day to be that teacher, to look after yourself and create for future patients a world that will show how you earned that role of teacher and how you came to be called the Latin docēre, “Doctor.” Congratulations and thank you for inspiring me.

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