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## From the Editor's Desk

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## From the Editor's Desk



*This address was given by John P. Mullooly, M.D. at the September, 1979 meeting of the Wisconsin Society of Internal Medicine, of which he was president.*

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It is a great pleasure and personal honor for me to address you, my fellow internists and colleagues, as your president. I genuinely and sincerely mean this, in all of its literal meaning. I have heard this said before by our past presidents, but it is only with the fullness of office and the existential reality of the event that the meaning and impact of these words have had their impact upon me. Perhaps a few words of explanation are in order, and an example from history should make the point.

I enjoyed being your president this past year and it has been a good year. As outlined in the newsletter, our Task Forces have been active in behalf of all of us. However, in analyzing why I've enjoyed it so much, I came upon the answer from the life of a man who lived in the 19th century and whom you all know — Abraham Lincoln. He was only 23 years old at the time and had been in New Salem only seven months when he ran for the state legislature in 1823. With the help of John McNaMar, his friend, and Mentor Graham, his schoolteacher, he composed a campaign pamphlet to be distributed. In the pamphlet, Lincoln said: "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for me, that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."

And I guess that description Lincoln gave of himself answers my own question, namely that I have and value your esteem as your president.

Getting back to Lincoln, it should be mentioned that he lost this election but eventually was elected to the legislature in Illinois. He not only gathered the esteem of the residents of Sangamon County, but many years later, in November, 1860, of the entire country, when he was elected President of the United States. As President, he earned the respect of the entire world and as generations succeed generations, he is admired by more and more people the world over, down to this very day.

In regard to this, I vividly recall being in London several years ago and was startled when I came upon a beautiful statue of Abraham Lincoln in a most prominent place. It was situated in a park between Westminster Cathedral and Parliament. Not far from Lincoln were statues of Winston Churchill, Gladstone, Palmerston, and Pitt. I thought it rather peculiar to see Lincoln in such a setting for, as you may remember, Great Britain sided with the South in the first two years of the Civil War and, in fact, nearly went to war with us over the Mason-Slidell Affair. However, they backed off from intervention when they got word of the defeat of the Confederacy at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Ewell's forces were defeated at the north end of the line by Hancock. Hood and Longstreet were held back at Little Round Top and the Peach Orchard the next day by Warren and Sickles, and finally the South retreated after Pickett's charge when Hunt's artillery and the whole line of federals decimated Pickett and 15,000 troops. The high tide of the Confederacy had been reached and was not to come back again. A change in England's attitude took place after this and was reflected three months later in an item in the *London Times*, commenting very favorably on Lincoln's Gettysburg address. The Civil War turned from a war for preservation of the Union to a war against slavery and hence, the growing admiration and esteem of England for the character of Abraham Lincoln and the placement of a statue in the park. It took time for tempers to cool and time for the British to appreciate what a great man Lincoln was in his genius for preserving democracy and this great country of ours. It is apparent to me that when the flaming, searing passions of partisan political debate burn out, the golden equality of principles, ethics and concern for the humanity of mankind triumphs over all.

### Professional and Patient Relationships

This brings me to some of the topics which I would like to discuss. They concern our relationship with our patients and the professional wisdom and ethics that are the foundation upon which all our other

relationships stand. While our society is dedicated to the socio-economics of medical practice, we all know that medical practice is more than this. The total is more than its constituent parts. While we are very skilled professionally and devote much of our time to post-graduate study and the socio-economic arena, we know that it is only a part of our lives. We are ever mindful of Lord Chesterfield's statement: "He who controls the purse, controls the power." Knowing all these things and knowing that the basis of good quality medical practice is rooted in the socio-economic order, we also know that transcending all of this and forming a medical practice's foundation is the ethic of the professional medical person.

The ethical-medical profession is something we take for granted today, but it would do us well to recall this ethic and reflect upon it and make it ever present in our mind. We should translate it into our behavior and articulate it in both the spoken and written word so that our patients and society will benefit from it. Our professional role has been given to us by society, and it values us. It will also protect us from those who would deprofessionalize us and reduce us to "technicians," "providers," etc. We have seen subtle attempts in the last few years to achieve this and we must resist these efforts at every turn.

Where can we find our professional code of medical ethics (Hippocratic Oath, AMA principles of ethics and other sources) unless we see it exemplified in the lives of physicians we admire — those who have shown respect for the individuality and personhood of each and every one of their patients. They embody these ethical principles and hence, we emulate them.

Today, however, we have seen a great change in the medical-ethical scene. Our rapid medical advances and our increasing technological ability have posed ethical dilemmas which were not faced by preceding generations of physicians. While I don't propose to list them all, some topics on which there is much ethical debate include:

1. Biogenetic engineering and research into recombinant DNA;
2. Nontherapeutic adult and fetal experimentation;
3. Euthanasia and living wills;
4. Informed consent;
5. Rights of patients;
6. Role of the government and its influence re: Federal Trade Commission re: advertising;
7. Brain death, transplantation surgery — definition of death;
8. Abortion;
9. Ethics of amniocentesis for fetal sex identification, just to list a few.

The medical ethical literature has grown immensely in the past ten years and fortunately or unfortunately, the discussions are being carried on principally by philosophers, theologians, ethicists and lawyers. There is very little M.D. input into the discussions which concern us so directly.

### Give Benefits of Experience

It is my personal observation, however, that all of these discussions are for the good, but it is necessary that physicians become more involved with them and give the other professions the benefit of our medical experience. There are signs that more physicians are getting concerned and involved. Witness the new column on clinical ethics in the *Archives of Medicine* and the increasing frequency of articles on ethics in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Annals of Internal Medicine*. It is important for physicians to give of their experiences and judgments in regard to many of these difficult ethical problems.

However, it seems that there are more questions than answers to these problems of medical practice. What are the answers to our medical dilemmas and how do we handle them? In my own way, I rely upon the mutual respect, faith and trust my patients and I have for each other — reciprocal. I also pray for the gift of wisdom. You know, it is very difficult to define wisdom. It is like love — hard to define — yet you know it when you see it and feel it. So it is with wisdom.

You can describe love. My favorite description of love is St. Paul's, in his letter to the Corinthians: "Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and endure whatever comes." What a beautiful description. It is like a painting of a sunset, wherein the artist puts on canvas his own feelings and emotions.

And so it is with wisdom. My favorite description of wisdom comes from the Book of Wisdom in the Old Testament. Interestingly, the author compares wisdom to a beautiful woman whom he is seeking.

She it was I loved and searched for from my youth; I resolved to have her as my bride. I fell in love with her beauty. Her closeness to God lends lustre to her noble birth, since the Lord of all has loved her.

Yes, she is an initiate in the mysteries of God's knowledge, making choice of the works he is to do.

If in this life, wealth be a desirable possession, what is more wealthy than wisdom whose work is everywhere?

Or if it be the intellect that is at work, where is there a greater than wisdom, designer of all?

Or if it be virtue you love, why, virtues are the fruit of her labors, since it is she who teaches temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude; nothing in life is more serviceable than these.

Or if you are eager for wide experiences, she knows the paths, she forecasts the future; she knows how to turn maxims and solve riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders of the unfolding of the ages and the times.

And then he winds up with (and this I like the best of all):

When I go home I shall take my ease with her, for nothing is bitter in her company; when life is shared with her there is no pain, gladness only, and joy.

And so, my friends, in these ethical debates to which there are no easy answers, let us pray for the grace of wisdom to light our paths in the service of the patients who give themselves over to our care and share this wisdom of medical practice with our friends from other disciplines who are trying to help us unravel these dilemmas. And if we do these things and maintain our professional code of ethics, may we also, like Abraham Lincoln, be honored by the future generations of our successors in medicine and in the forthcoming generations of our human society.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.

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