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From the Editor's Desk

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From the Editor's Desk



Healing the Healer

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, under the leadership of our president, Dr. Eugene Diamond, sponsored a meeting of medical students and house staff in Chicago in February, 1980. The purpose of this meeting was to listen to our young physicians and medical students in order to see what their needs are in regard to their roles as Catholics and their views on current medico-moral questions. The group was widely representative of midwestern centers of medical education and included young men and women from Loyola University School of Medicine, Northwestern, the Medical College of Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin, University of Illinois, and others. The germination of this idea for house staff and medical students began at the last two national meetings of the NFCPG in Buffalo and New Orleans and was initiated by contact with students and house staff. The idea gathered increased impetus through letters from students in various places in the country to this writer and from continued pressure on the local scene here in Milwaukee and at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

The results of this dialogue were most enlightening to us all and confirmed the fact that there is a tremendous thirst for guidance and truth and a quest for a deepening of personal spirituality among our

young physicians. There is likewise a desire for them to band together to achieve these goals. The modern student of medicine finds himself immersed in the sea of changing values of secular humanism in his classes in medical school. The medical student must pick his residency with increasing discernment so as not to be placed in an environment in which his medical-ethical stance will be threatened and subverted. As we have learned to our regret, the ideals of the Hippocratic Oath no longer have credibility in many of our institutions of medical training. Medical students and residents are continually assaulted by those who openly advocate and encourage abortion, not to mention some of the procedures which lead up to these ethical dilemmas, e.g., amniocentesis, genetic counseling, etc.

In addition, the group is somewhat at odds with the typical aggressive attitude most Catholic physicians feel toward these movements in our society. They are more personally oriented and are most reluctant to rashly judge their peers and/or professors. They would rather remain silent and make up their own minds. On the other hand, some are quite vociferous and militant at upholding the traditional medico-moral stance.

On a deeper level, there is a yearning and thirst for these neophytes in medicine to come closer to Our Lord and to be with Him and in Him in all they say, do and are. To quote one vigorous, articulate surgical resident from Milwaukee, "Without spirituality, faith and love, moral laws we're talking about seem cold and self-righteous." This statement calls to mind the 19th century Protestant missionaries as depicted in Michener's celebrated novel, *Hawaii*.

As the dialogue in Chicago developed over the hours, a consensus of opinion emerged, viz., that it was essential that spiritual support groups should be formed on an informal level at every medical school and training center. The groups should be small (five to seven individuals) and should concentrate on developing the spirituality and medical-ethical expertise of each and every member. A medically oriented priest or nun and older physician should be present to help guide and coordinate these support groups. What an opportunity for the many chaplains and physicians throughout our country who staff hospitals, to help our fledgling colleagues in the noble profession of medicine. Through these groups, much of the division between chaplains and physicians which we have seen over the years would dissolve. They would be working together for the complete healing of the patients and, more importantly, of themselves. As one individual said of the spiritual formation group, "We will find the courage, strength and wisdom to build upon a morality we all believe in. We will be able to understand pain and suffering, which are so much a part of our lives." And further, "Together, in a brand new and fresh light, we can approach a problem and perhaps reach a resolution of that problem in a different way than we might have otherwise."

In order to concretize this dialogue, the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' board of directors passed the following resolution at its March board meeting:

- WHEREAS there has been a great deal of interest manifested by medical students and house staff for some help in developing their own spirituality and knowledge of Catholic medical ethics, and
- WHEREAS the president of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds has sponsored preliminary discussions with house staff and medical students, and
- WHEREAS the Constitution and Bylaws of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds are dedicated to forming and sponsoring Catholic medical student groups in local medical schools,
- BE IT RESOLVED that the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds go on record as supporting this type of venture for house staff and medical students.

Further efforts to supplement this resolution shall be made by NCFPG on both national and local levels, and efforts are being made currently in Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York City. Our readers are encouraged to start their own groups, using their own resources.

As we see the increasing evidence in our country of the toll on the personal lives of our colleagues in medicine, as evidenced by the Impaired Physicians program begun by the AMA and state medical associations, it is most vital that we and those who are in training get their act together. It is time for us all to help each other in our own unique manner and the way to begin is by praying for one another. We should pray for each and every physician in this country of ours, that they will be true to themselves, their patients who have entrusted their lives to them, their families, and to the Lord Who created them and died for them. As Father Donald Driscoll, S.J., moderator of the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild, suggested, "We should be creative in pursuit of this goal of praying for one another. There are men and women across the country who, let's say, in scrubbing up for surgery, will, side by side, just pray together — in other words, just in that moment, capitalize on whatever time they have together to begin this spiritual enrichment. I think that every Wednesday at 12 noon, all Catholic physicians across the nation should be united in prayer for a moment or two, in communion with Him, and thereby be linked together in serving Him, themselves, family and patients."

An excellent suggestion! Perhaps in this way the Divine Healer will heal the healer and we all will be one in Him.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.
Editor