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ORATION: The Image of a Physician

Nurtured by the love of his fellow man, he aspires to be a member of that group of trustees who dedicate themselves to the possessor of life's principle. Having been chosen, he embarks on a mission in which he learns to utilize his intellectual capacity in developing those skills so essential in the performance and practice of his art. As the metamorphosis begins, the wisdom of the mentor molds the exuberance of the aspirant as he faces the realization that he must forever be the student, and, at the same time develop his prowess as a teacher, for in his obligations as a member of his chosen fraternity, accepting the title of the privileged recipient confers upon him the covenant of the responsible transmitter. If he is worthy of this title, he soon recognizes that despite keenness of vigilance and unswerving perseverance, despite complete mastery of the knowledge and tools of his craft, humility is his greatest ally, when he is challenged by the unyielding pertinacity of his adversary, as he shares the frustrating and bitter anguish of defeat. Undaunted by adversities, strength of character and dedication spawn the fortitude and replenish the stamina so essential in facing the rigors of the day, the challenge of tomorrow, and the uncertainty of the future. Accepting the standard of the Caduceus, he becomes a member of the noblest of all professions. In acknowledging the greatest honour bestowed on a fellow human being by mankind, his own life becomes a probation. He must always be the master - but only in his proficiency as a servant. In his every thought, act and deed, he must be the exemplification of the highest ideals of the code to which he dedicates the very sinews of his existence. To those who place the essence of their being in his trust, the mark of integrity must herald the emblem of reliability, while compassion reflects the measure of reverence for the supreme and most sacrosanct of principles, the principle of life, servant of that principle, in whose hands is placed its trusteeship proudly bears the title of physician.

Such is the image that has been entrusted to our generation. Our deeds as well as our accomplishments must constantly be assessed in the light that reflects its qualities and its principles. |

We live in a wondrous era. Our generation is blessed with the generous proceeds of the unprecedented break-through in the marvel of scientific and technological advances. We have witnessed the unleashing of the atom and the awesome disgorgement of its energy. The ability of man to transport himself to the most distant corners of this world, and into the beyond seems to have cheated time of its duration. Instant communication and the ability of man to transmit ideas and events at the moment of their conception, are but a few of the examples of our accomplishments. We also bear witness to the toll that has been exacted by accosting the equilibrium and the fine balances of nature.

Our environment undergoes rapid change, and as we become enmeshed in its acceleration, faced with the greatest challenge of our time, we are stultified by the problems of man ability, or his inability, to adapt and conform to the needs of a rapidly changing medium. As the metronome of change increases its tempo, we are stripped of the luxury of time in the accommodative process. Patience and wisdom are lost virtues as the crescendo of demand outstrips our available human resources. In the frenzied attempt to adapt, man's unselfishness is denuded. Yielding to

the stresses and the threat of his emotional and physical survival, cherished principles and moral restraints are cast aside. Honorable tradition, oaths, and solemn vows are subjected to the ignominy of desecration. The dignity of man undergoes a humiliating attrition as the measure of change rapidly transforms the hope of the future into the remorse of the past. Even the dedicated, in whose hands destiny has placed the responsibility of leadership, stand crestfallen, besieged with the demands of compromises unfulfilled. Tantalized by pledges undeliverable, a society that focuses on materialism as a yardstick of progress, allows the withering of human values as "*My right and your responsibility*" constitutes the epitome of our time.

The medical profession is swept into the tumultuous wake of a society whose members are stressed beyond the limit of endurance. The physician also finds himself in the midst of this social stampede as its members frantically search for a more conducive medium. In their path of escape lie the shattered remnants of pride and self-sufficiency as identity and its security are decimated by the unrelenting process of dehumanization.

Subjected to the same stresses, the physician experiences a like anguish of deprivation. Staggered by the burdens of increasing responsibility, often in the wake of decreasing authority, powerless in stemming the tide of disease wrought of social ferment, he soon finds himself a victim, his energies sapped by the parasite of despair. In this state of turpitude, he soon becomes the prey of the inexorable objurgations of a desperate public. Failing in his efforts to alter the environment, he senses an utter futility, as he unwittingly saturates the pleading victims with the drugs of tranquility while others seek their own means of respite by yielding to the spirit of the intoxicant, or the limbo of the narcotic. Hidden and obscured in the shadows of this seething maelstrom lies the hibernating yield of the most productive and what could be the proudest era in the annals of the medical profession.

As the physician of today views his own image in the mirror of time, he must, as a seeker of truth, recognize the reflection of a troubled, a painful, and a tormented expression. As he reflects on the forces and the ingredients of its genesis, he must begin to identify his own disease which drains him of his own most vital energies.

The medical profession has always been bound by the cohesiveness of common objectives and goals. The stentorian voice of Hippocrates has been heard over thousands of years and has generated the pride and the dignity in the unity among those who shared its universal code of behavior. The physician's dedication to this ethic has throughout the generations of his forefathers engendered the trust and the security in that sacred relationship that exists between physician and patient. In an age when the state searches the depths of its own conscience in an attempt to determine its right to destroy life, in the same age which we sacrifice no measure of energy in cheating death of its claim, even among those who choose self destruction, its dedicated protector stands mute, as the apostate and the renegade of a cherished oath and trust take part in a reprehensible duplicity. The apathy of a responsible profession is so painfully reminiscent of the unconcerned and the uninvolved, as the doctors of infamy unleashed their unrestrained fury by ministering to the libertine attitudes of the day. If we are to acknowledge the continuing trust given us as dedicated guardians of life, we must examine our conscience before we accept tolerate or condone-annihilation-as the answer to the problems of procreation.

The shocking indecision in the dilemma faced by our student physicians in their choice of an oath as they approach the threshold of service, reflects a grave portent. Our citadels of learning must answer, and be held accountable, for the responsibility of imbuing their wards with moral

restraints and the disciplines of ethical practice. The interests and the objectives of our profession are better served if the aspiring physician accedes to the vow of Hippocrates, before he acknowledges his vocation,

The objective of unity should not be pursued merely for the security of the physician but should constitute the means and the guarantee of good patient care. The ingredient of unity is composed of units which are equal in importance and complement each other in what they individually supply in their contribution in completing the whole.

The specialties of medicine should constitute such units. They complement each other only if they recognize themselves as being equal in importance and are allowed to share in the proceeds of a combined function. The isolation of any unit deprives its members of completeness and denies them of their identity. The participants of such coordination must integrate their efforts through the medium of communication. An understanding and a mutual respect for each other's responsibilities in an atmosphere of patience, tolerance, and courtesy allows for the fruition of common goals.

The importance of this concept is magnified as the mounting stockpile of knowledge exacts a more prodigious challenge which strains the intellectual capacity even of those richly endowed. The consequences of communicative loss and uncoordinated effort destroy the synergism which should constitute total patient care.

The dichotomy of the academician and the practitioner evolves in an erosion in the concept of unity. If he is to be effective, the academician can no longer isolate himself in the cloistered cocoon of a tower. He must mold his product by being cognizant of the changing and varying needs of those to be served. His accuracy of judgment in establishing priorities in the community can only be achieved if he becomes a part of its mainstream. In academic isolation humanism suffers.

Likewise, the delivery of medical care does not satisfy the responsibility of the practitioner. He must establish a pathway of influx so that new ideas, new methods, and new procedures can become a part of his armamentarium. Sound medical practice can only be achieved if he continues to be a part of the academic mainstream. In the isolation of the practitioner the curriculum suffers.

Too much curriculum and not enough vitae offers a promise without hope, whereas too much vitae and not enough curriculum offers hope without promise.

The healer must be identified by proper proportions of the yields of science and the moral fiber of the humanitarian.

The physician who expertly ministers to those who seek his service but exempts himself from the obligations of community-need fails to recognize his proper goals and his responsibilities. He can only judge his effectiveness in this capacity by exercising a sense of priority and fair-mindedness, in affording those in need an equal distribution of available facilities and resources. A lack of perspective allows their depletion, when injudicious employment of methods and procedures applicable only but to a few prevails. The adventure of intellectual curiosity and the egomania of sensationalism are no justification for the kindling of false hope in a service unavailable to all in need.

A startling loss in our capacity to sustain effort reflects itself in our failure and in our inability to provide---**the available**. While we pride ourselves with the exhilarating success of the antibiotic sensation, the disease of venereum runs amok in unmolested fury. In the midst of a

bountiful time that enjoys unprecedented opulence, hunger and malnutrition abound, as rodents feast on the plentiful fruits of overabundance. We must stifle our imaginations, lest they reveal the consequences of exposure of what was once a pristine atmosphere as we observe the disintegration of our cherished monuments of antiquity, in an atmosphere supersaturated with the excrements of modern day society.

Progress might well be justified if it demands re-definition.

Entailed in the responsibilities of delivering care, the modern day physician employs personnel to whom he must delegate authority. Expediency is never a justifiable basis in the utilization of individuals who are not versed in the ethical disciplines of acting and reacting appropriately, to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the patient. The inviolability of professional secrets cannot be compromised in the medium of change and development, and the responsibility of the quality of care rendered a patient **regardless of the number involved in its delivery**, rests directly on the shoulders of the physician.

The utilization of industrial methods and techniques should complement but should not compete with the basic philosophy and attitude of medicine. A careful scrutiny and proper selection, as well as any appropriate modification of techniques utilized in an occupation should precede its incorporation into a profession.

As the physician in his toil and in the practice of his disciplines encounters the emotional upheaval, the suffering, and the torment of those who seek his assistance, he soon becomes engulfed in its experience. Disease in its unbridled fury defies adherence to a schedule of convenience, so that its minister must often sacrifice the company of his loved ones as he caters to the exactions, the disciplines, and the demands of his profession. In order to devote the full energies of his attention to the needs of his patient, he must be unencumbered by the worry of economic security for his family, as well as for himself. In our profession there is nothing inconsistent, within the sphere of ethical practice, in receiving just recompense for services rendered.

In our society we presently find ourselves under the most severe of strictures owing to our inertia in correcting the corruptible and despicable practices of our miscreant physicians, who confuse a byproduct with an objective.

If we are to continue as noble and trusted servants of a needy public, we cannot allow the continuing substitution of an illness with the disease of penury and destitution, by those who blaspheme their profession by yielding to venality and corruption.

The dignity of man must constantly challenge the efforts of the physician in his devotion to upholding it. Respect for dignity reflects an appreciation of life's value. We as physicians must probe deeply to constantly assess ourselves in our successes, or in our failures, in maintaining life's dignity.

As we become more proficient in our ability to interfere with the forces of nature, the quality of life is endangered, by the threat of being compromised, in the quantity of its extension.

How is the quality and the dignity of life maintained when the recipient of its extension is consigned to a loneliness of despair, bitterness, and to resentment, and is allowed to suffer social and economic deprivation?

How is the quality and the dignity of life maintained when we force a burgeoning potential of experience and wisdom to become blighted by premature sentence to the lonely pastures of retirement?

How is the quality and the dignity of life maintained when the recipient to its extension has reached the final and dismal abyss of endurance and begs for death as a welcome emancipator?

How is the quality and the dignity of life maintained when we promote widespread abdication of responsibility among those who bear the crucible of life?

How is the quality and the dignity of life maintained when the potential recipient of its extension is coerced to hope for tragedy, so that time does not cheat him from being tragedy's beneficiary?

As scientists and as humanitarians we must look upon a trust as the keystone of our professional matrix. It cannot be maintained if the patient is allowed to diagnose his physician's ailments, especially when the symptoms and the signs are plainly evident to both. As a body of physicians, entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining health and engaging disease, we have none other than ourselves to maintain our own health and to diagnose our own illness.

In our own ills, and as our own diagnosticians we must exercise the same methods of diagnosis and treatment as we employ in our daily disciplines. The diagnosis is obscured and resists identification if signs are not recognized and symptoms are allowed to evade perception by being subdued in the subconscious. The diagnosis, however, is a sterile achievement, if it is not inseminated with appropriate measures of therapy. Trust, reliance and integrity cannot be maintained in the healer, who not only is the harbinger of disease, but who exhibits an oblivion to its correction.

As we continue the search of our own ills, and the search for our own analeptic, we must be guided by the same principles, and we must utilize the same disciplines by which a physician is identified. Combining humility and compassion with an understanding that becomes a physician, our vigilance and our reliability should not waver for lack of perseverance.

As we face the challenge of the morrow, may we utilize our God given intellectual ability not only in reacting, but in acting in a manner that reflects wisdom and strength of character.

May our anguish of defeat and the threat of our adversity, spawn fortitude that makes us worthy of our honor.

With the mark of integrity, adhering to the oath of dedication and moral restraint, let us actuate and galvanize the forces that bring about unity and allow us to become Masters of our crafts, and noble members of a proud fraternity of physicians. With reverence and a complete submission to the servitude of the object of our profession, may we again become leaders who permeate trust and hope.

Before we place our tired and furrowed brows on the pillow of final slumber, may we be able to look back on the halcyon of peace and tranquility, and as we pass the staff of the cadences to the next generation, may our countenance reflect-----through the eyes of the master physician-----His image of a physician.