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SPIRITUAL STRENGTH, RECREATION AND SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENT IN THE LIFE OF A DOCTOR

W. Lloyd Kemp, M.D.*

It is for me a great honour to be invited to talk to you on this occasion—a significant event in your career. I feel a sense of pride in and loyalty to this great institution—a pride and loyalty which I hope you will share as the years go by. As I look upon the faces of the senior men on the staff I sense a deep appreciation of their kindly help in leading me out of the wilderness of my early years and giving me orientation. I am, too, grateful for the privileges which this hospital has extended to me: for the professional associations through the years and for the fast friendships which I have been privileged to enjoy.

When I was asked to speak to you, it was suggested that I bring to you some of the thoughts or convictions which may have crystallized during my many years of practice. You will understand, I am sure, if some of my remarks seem personal in nature.

Thirty-two years ago I accepted my appointment as an intern at the Henry Ford Hospital. Judged as a portion of one man’s life span that is a fairly long experience. But judged in the light of the centuries which have gone before thirty-two years is a very brief period. Yet during that period, or, shall I say, during the first half of the 20th century, we have witnessed remarkable, even epoch making; and fantastic are the scientific discovery and progress taking place right now.

For example it was in 1920 that Sir Frederick Banting located in London, Ontario, to engage in private practice. His prospects were anything but bright when after the first month only one patient had consulted him, and the total entry on his books was four dollars. As time went on he continued to observe office hours waiting for the patients who never came. However, he was a man of great persistence and energy and found outlet and occupation by teaching at the University of Western Ontario Medical School. His labors were rewarded amazingly soon for in 1922 insulin had been discovered and was being used in the treatment of diabetes, with the astounding result that countless children, formerly doomed to die, now reach maturity; and for millions there is the prospect of a happy and useful life.

In my own field, typhoid fever is rare; diphtheria and whooping cough have been conquered. The mortality in pneumonia has dropped from 30% to a negligible figure. I have had only one surgical mastoid in ten years. We are perhaps at the threshold of discovery of a protective agent against polio-myelitis—to mention only a few. And now we are entering the atomic age in medicine.

Address to the graduating residents and interns, May 25, 1954.

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The Henry Ford Hospital has experienced an amazing growth, as you all realize. And I think that aside from its good fortune in an able, intelligent and skillful staff, one important reason was the concept brought into focus that a patient is more than a headache, or a cough, or a broken leg. The patient is evaluated in his entirety, with the particular problem a component of the whole picture. This was in those days a new manner and approach. It still stands as the proper manner of approach to any medical problem.

It has been said, and I am sure you have all heard, that the three I's—Intelligence, Industry, and Integrity are the essential ingredients of a successful career. And that is only too true. But I think there is another component which, for the practicing physician, is also essential. I will call it *Humanity* and define it as a quality of understanding the patient and his environment; of being interested in his problems and showing a sympathy toward his anxieties and fears. It is perhaps this need, so often sensed and not satisfied, that has brought about the psychosomatic concept in medicine. It is perhaps this need, so often sensed and not satisfied, that has brought so much criticism of the medical profession.

What constitutes success in medicine will vary according to the individual's definition. What is the motivation? One will seek it in terms of financial profit, but that is fallacious, for there are many other fields where one can make more money, more easily with less anxiety and perhaps have more fun. Another will turn to medicine because of the position the physician holds in the community—one of esteem, affection, and respect—thanks to the heritage from those gone before. Another will go down the long difficult road of training and continue on that arduous path because of an earnest desire to be helpful to his fellow-man. I think that the soul-satisfaction which comes out of that travailous experience can best be found through the consciousness that you are important, essential, and helpful. Is it pertinent to ask "Is the physician of today as revered as was the case two generations ago?" From time to time we are alerted to the menace of socialized or state-controlled medicine. One cannot think of the government invading the sphere of the church or the priesthood. And isn't medicine a ministry?

You have come to this point in your career where you walk through the portals of the present and face the challenge and thrilling expectancy of what lies ahead. You are debtors to all who have gone before who have prepared the scientific and clinical banquet table at which you can feast. You now have much knowledge and from here out will acquire wisdom. What can I offer that will be helpful to you who are about to engage in the Art of Practice?

I am reminded of the story of Pericles and the Athenian Youth. Pericles was admonishing them for their actions and thinking. Said he—"When I was your age I thought as you do." Whereupon one Athenian youth spoke up and said, "Oh Pericles, would that we had known you when you were in your prime."

Do not permit the making of money your goal. Rather find your satisfaction in the joy of being helpful and useful to others. You have your armamentarium. Bring your skills to the problems which confront you—approaching each case with
thoroughness and sincerity and honesty. Sir William Osler wrote of the magic word "WORK." Success in any field is achieved by willingness to work, to work hard and with enthusiasm.

Treat your patient as a human being—not a disease. Remember that a large part of your job in addition to healing is to promote his happiness and well being and to allay his anxieties. We hear much about medical ethics. They are just plain ethics. We hear much about the patient-physician relationship but how seriously do we explore its true meaning? Dr. Frederick Loomis, a distinguished Obstetrician, recently published a booklet entitled "In a Chinese Garden." I quote, therefrom, a letter which I think is apropos.

Peking, China

"Dear Doctor:

Please don’t be too surprised in getting a letter from me. I haven’t any real right to address you and I am signing only my first name. My surname is the same as yours.

You won’t even remember me. Two years ago I was in your hospital under the care of another doctor. I had never heard of you. I lost my baby the day it was born.

That same day my doctor, who was skillful enough but perhaps not too understanding, came in to see me, and as he left he said, “Oh, by the way, there is a doctor here with the same name as yours who noticed your name on the board, and asked me about you. He said he would like to come in to see you if you were willing and I would permit him to, because the name is not a common one and you might be a relative. I told him you had lost your baby and I didn’t think you would want to see anybody, but it was all right with me.”

And then in a little while you came in. You put your hand on my arm and sat down for a moment beside my bed. You didn’t say much of anything but your eyes and your voice were kind and pretty soon I felt better. I was a very long way from home and had no one of my own. As you sat there I noticed that you looked tired and the lines in your face were very deep. I never saw you again but the nurses told me you were in the hospital practically night and day.

This afternoon I was a guest in a beautiful Chinese home in Peking. The garden was enclosed by a high wall, and on one side, surrounded by twining red and white flowers, was a brass plate about two feet long embedded in the wall. I asked someone to translate the Chinese characters for me. They said:

ENJOY YOURSELF IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK

I began to think about it for myself. I have not wanted another baby because I am still grieving for the one I lost, but I decided that moment that I should not wait any longer. Perhaps it may be later than I think, too. And then, because I was thinking of my baby, I thought of you and the tired lines in your face, and
the moment of sympathy you gave me when I so needed it. I don’t know how old you are but I am quite sure you are old enough to be my father; and I know that those few minutes you spent with me meant little or nothing to you, of course—but they meant a great deal to a woman who was desperately unhappy and alone.

So I am presumptuous as to think that in turn I can do something for you, too. Perhaps for you it is later than you think. Please forgive me, but when your work is over, on the day you get my letter, please sit down very quietly, all by yourself, and think about it.

Marguerite"

Does this not suggest a fine patient-physician relationship?

You may not realize it but there is only one foundation on which to build a successful practice and that is satisfied patients. Don’t brush your patients off. Set as your task a job well done. It is not how many patients you see in a day that matters, but rather, how well you handle those you do see. Otherwise your chickens will come home to roost.

Be forthright and honest in your relationships. Treat the patient as you would be treated if you were the patient. Or putting it another way, don’t do anything to him that you would not want done to you.

Find time for spiritual exercise—no one needs spiritual strength as does the physician.

Develop an avocation to which you may turn for your hours of leisure. Find interest in worthwhile institutions and projects and make your contribution as a citizen. These will also enrich your life, find you worthwhile friendships and enhance your value and effectiveness and dignity as a physician.

Be available and always carry your responsibility faithfully. An incident which occurred several years ago will illustrate. I received a call one early morning from a mother who was concerned because of the peculiar behavior of her ten-year-old son. She gave a very vague story although she was an intelligent and a responsible mother. From the paucity of symptoms which she presented I could draw no conclusion. But something told me I should go and survey the situation myself. Now I do not enjoy getting up at 2 a.m. any more than you do.

When I arrived at the home I was met by the father who staggered down the hall as if intoxicated. He directed me upstairs where I was shocked to find the mother with whom I had talked just fifteen minutes before face down on the floor at the entrance of her son’s bedroom—unconscious. A hurried look revealed that the son, too, was unconscious. It was quite obvious that these people were overcome by gas poisoning. I went immediately to an adjoining bedroom to call the fire department and while dialing the telephone the twelve-year-old daughter staggered out of the bathroom and fell before me unconscious. The entire family was rushed to the hospital by ambulance and all recovered.
Not until I sat at breakfast some hours later did the full force of that dramatic situation come upon me. I then realized that, but for the Grace of God, a stark tragedy would have unfolded that night. How happy I was that I had listened to the still small voice!

If you follow these simple rules than the financial rewards will come but more important are the valid compensations which reward your efforts and make them worthwhile.

There is nothing in the Hippocratic oath which says you should not give time to your family; that you should labor endlessly without recreation; that you are not entitled to adequate compensation for your labors, and security in the sunset years, and an abundant life.

In the year, 1875, there was born in Upper Alsace to a simple parish pastor, school teacher and organist, a son destined to become the greatest living man of our time. By the end of his twenties he had earned and acquired academic degrees of Doctor of Music, Philosophy, and Theology—and was at that moment, distinguished as a concert organist and organ craftsman, the greatest authority on Bach and his music, theologian and preacher, philosopher, and scientist—to mention only a few. But he had yet not found that inward happiness for which he was searching. And so he entered medical school because, as he puts it, he wanted to give direct service to humanity.

Upon completion of his training, Albert Schweitzer renounced the gracious living which he might have found in Europe to go to Africa as a medical missionary and find the life abundant. He made his first visit to this country a few years ago at which time an honorary degree was conferred by the University of Chicago. An incident which occurred there indicates the humility and majestic simplicity of the man. The story was related to me by a friend, the organist and carillonneur of the university, who was privileged to spend many hours with him. Schweitzer was gathered with the Chancellor and faculty and dignitaries of the city receiving his instructions and listening to rehearsal of the details attendant upon the ceremony of the morrow. He was obviously indifferent and weary of the situation and finally said, "Gentlemen, you forgive me my mistakes and I will forgive you yours." Whereupon he turned and walked away from the group toward the console of the great organ, and asked, "If you please, will you permit me to play the organ for ten minutes." The pomp and circumstance were no match for the hunger in his soul—for he had no organ in the wilds of Africa.

Albert Schweitzer is not great because he is a musician; he is not great because he is a missionary or a minister; he is not great because he is a doctor; he is great because "he has gone about doing good"—he has great love for human beings and is humble in his service to them. He has great reverence for life. With Einstein he believes that the mysterious is the fairest expression of life—the cradle of all true science and art.
We cannot all be Albert Schweitzer’s but we all can have a spark of him in us and reap great rewards in the practice of the greatest profession on earth. What I have tried to say to you this morning is well expressed in the words of this poem by Kenyon Cox:

“Work thou for pleasure,
Paint or sing or carve
The thing thou Lovest,
Tho’ the body starve.

“Who works for glory
Misses oft the goal.
Who works for money
Coins his very soul.

“Work for the works’ sake
Then, and it may be,
That all these things shall
Be added unto thee.”

I envy you—your youth, your opportunities, your ambitions and satisfactions and wish you good fortune and great success—every one of you!