

Thoughts on the Future of Healthcare



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It has been aptly stated that trying to predict the future based on the past is like trying to drive your car by looking in the rear-view mirror. Thus, every indication suggests that the healthcare delivery system of the future will little resemble that of the past. Envisioning a new and better healthcare system could be reassuring if that new system results in a healthier America. The more complex question is how the future of the medical profession melds with the future healthcare delivery system. In order to reaffirm the role of physicians in healthcare, we as physicians must recognize the power that we hold, and use it for the good of our profession, now.

Physicians must recapture the role of patient advocate. Our professionalism is based upon the knowledge and skill set we acquired through rigorous education and training. We can do better than arbitrary performance metrics. Care is about caring. Physicians understand the devastating consequences of disease better than anyone. We understand the powers of placebo and of hope. We understand that 'doctor's advice' is powerful medicine. We need to make time to listen. We can do better than patient satisfaction scores. Medicine is a profession. Professions are characterized by a high degree of autonomy and judgment - professional judgment. People and disease are complex, which is why medical training is long and intense. Protocols can be deceptively easy and the

data on which yesterday's protocols are based may be biased and flawed, or old and outdated. There is nothing wrong with best practices and with minimizing variation, but a sick person is not a widget, and is best served with individualized care. Protocols make medicine easy; we need to make sure that we never sacrifice the best medical care for the easiest plan of care. Physicians are physicians. Professions typically enjoy social status, regard and esteem which are based in the higher social function of their work, which is regarded as vital to society as a whole and thus of having a special and valuable nature - professional expertise. There is nothing wrong with the respect

conferred upon professionals who have earned that designation. Physicians are not simply providers and to accept that designation means that we are losing professional pride, and professional status. We physicians need to remember that we went to medical school, at some sacrifice and when there is talk about bringing value to the patient care encounter, we need to stand up and be counted.

Professionals participate in the mentoring and training of the future practitioners of the profession. There is something to be learned from everyone and there is great satisfaction in teaching anyone. However, we can never forget that learning and teaching future physicians are part of the commitment we made to our profession.

Finally, professions dominate, police and protect their own area of expertise and the conduct of its members, and exercises a dominating influence over its entire field. Professional must work together to protect their collective interests from competition, outside regulation, and devaluation. Now is the time for unity and advocacy. Everyone is looking for value in healthcare, isn't it time that the public realized that value can be intrinsic. Gold beats out glitter and substance rules over appearances. How is it that the public lost track of the fact that their medical care cannot be left to the internet, popular television, or a provider?

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