

## ***Virtual Mentor***

**American Medical Association Journal of Ethics**

**February 2000, Volume 2, Number 2: 9-18**  
**Hearts, Anatomical and Other**

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## ***Virtual Mentor***

American Medical Association Journal of Ethics  
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### **CASE AND COMMENTARY**

#### **Student Dating of Patients' Relatives**

Commentary by Faith Lagay, PhD

#### **Case**

John, a third-year medical student, is currently doing a pediatrics rotation. One of the patients he has seen is Nicholas, a 3-year-old with a chronic ear infection. John has seen Nicholas several times during his rotation. Nicholas' 25-year-old mother, Paula, appreciates the care her son has received from the attending physician and John. Paula is single and a student at a local community college. John feels that he and Paula have some "chemistry" and would like to ask her out on a date. John realizes that it is unethical for a physician to have a sexual relationship with a patient, but he thinks that asking Paula out is harmless. Even if their relationship should develop into something sexual, John thinks there is no harm in that because his role is that of a medical student and the patient is Nicholas and not his mother.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What do you think of John's reasoning?
2. Do you think there is a potential problem here?

See what the AMA *Code of Medical Ethics* says about this topic in Opinion 8.145 Sexual or romantic relations between physicians and key third parties. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

Faith Lagay, PhD is managing editor in of *Virtual Mentor*.

*The people and events in this case are fictional. Resemblance to real events or to names of people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. The viewpoints expressed on this site are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.*

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## ***Virtual Mentor***

American Medical Association Journal of Ethics  
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### **IN THE LITERATURE**

#### **The Long History of Considering Patient's Emotions**

Faith Lagay, PhD

Articles and books on bioethics continue to expand in both number and the range of topics discussed. Between 1989 and 1998, more than 4000 articles alone were published in MEDLINE-cited journals. Some of the major topics examined are the patient-physician relationship, end-of-life care, reproductive medicine, genetics, and the allocation of scarce medical resources. From these publications, we will be selecting a handful of articles and chapters, some of which reflect issues of perennial concern to physicians, others reflect more recent quandries resulting from advances in biomedical technology.

A new article or book chapter will be featured every month, accompanied by questions intended to guide readers along the path of ethical reasoning and to promote discussion.

#### **Philosophy and Medicine: The Arts of Life**

*Empty is that philosopher's argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sicknesses of bodies, so to there is no use in philosophy, if it does not throw out suffering from the soul.*

— Epicurus (341-270 BC)

The early philosophers did not limit their thinking to intellectual matters but also dealt with practical human issues of love, passion, anger, and death. The aims of philosophy, like the goals of ancient medicine, were to improve human life in all its aspects. Although love and desire, fear and anger have been largely excluded from contemporary discussions of medicine, philosophy, and ethics, these emotions have provided philosophers sources for moral reflection and the basis for a healthy and richly human life.

Comparisons between the tasks of medicine and the tasks of philosophy found throughout the writings of antiquity are not merely metaphorical. As the arts of medicine were applied to improve the health of the body, philosophy was applied to improve the health of the soul, and both were considered necessary to treat patients.

*It is not true that there exists an art called medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul. Nor is it true that*

*the latter is inferior to the former, in its theoretical grasp and therapeutic treatment of individual cases.*

— Galen (129-ca 199)

Emotions occupied a central role in ancient medical and ethical conceptions of the human being. Love and desire, jealousy, anger, and fear, could all cause disturbances in the soul, sometimes creating pain and general unhappiness far greater than any caused by bodily illness or injury. Philosophy was considered as necessary as medicine in the healing processes related to the human condition.

*Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when he is young nor weary in the search of it when he has grown old. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. And to say that the season for studying philosophy has not yet come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more.*

— Epicurus, Letter to Menoecus

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How should contemporary physicians consider patient's emotions in relation to the healing process?
2. Does engagement at the emotional level between patients and physicians compromise the clinical objectivity of the relationship?

To explore these themes in greater depth read, Martha Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 1994).

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## ***Virtual Mentor***

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### **ART OF MEDICINE**

#### **Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss***

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), a Viennese painter, lived and worked during a period of enormous cultural, artistic, and scientific fecundity. His contemporaries included such luminaries as Sigmund Freud and the architect Otto Wagner. He founded the Art Nouveau Movement in Vienna, which started as an oppositional force, decrying the overly academic approach to art in the 19th century. Klimt is best known for his later works, which included richly decorative murals and portraits. The women in his paintings were often depicted in mythic settings, as, seen in the painting of Salome holding the head of John the Baptist. His many other portraits of women evoked strong images of eroticism, sexuality, and love.

[The Kiss](#) (1907-1908, 180 x 180 cm, Österreichisches Galerie Wien, Vienna) is perhaps Klimt's most popular and enduring work, evoking passion and intimacy through the use of vibrant colors. In the painting, only the couple's faces and arms are visible, and their embrace suggests the power of loving touch. The therapeutic benefits of touch are undeniable. Infants and young children benefit physiologically and emotionally from the loving touch of parents and caretakers. Studies have shown that the simple act of touching can lower blood pressure and help individuals deal better with pain [1-3].

"Laying on of hands" by physicians [4] and other healers has a long history and reflects the importance of touch in the healing process. One physician commented that despite the fact that nonessential touching was frowned on during her training, she would still hold an elderly patient's hand and put an arm around a worried pregnant teenager. As she said:

I always touch patients when they come to see me. I shake their hands in greeting, take a pulse on everyone, put a hand on a shoulder while auscultating lung fields. Although I don't usually initiate hugs, I'm happy to share one. ...Don't be afraid to touch your patients. They figuratively and literally put themselves into your hands. Handle them with care, but handle them. (Fugh-Berman A. Why you should touch your patients. *Med Econ*. December 13, 1993;70:91. No. 23.)

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## ***Virtual Mentor***

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### **PERSONAL NARRATIVE**

#### **Through the Patient's Eyes: Moments in Love**

Audiey Kao, MD PhD

What is it like to be a patient, experiencing a debilitating, potentially life-threatening illness or encountering the health care environment, perhaps for the first time, from a position of vulnerability? Through the stories of patients, physicians come to see themselves, and most especially their communications, from the other side of the equation. When patients—and that includes physicians who become patients—voice their most intimate thoughts, feelings, and reactions, much can be learned.

To arrive at the place where respectful, trusting, open, and truly informed patient-physician communications can take place, one begins by giving the patient undivided, close attention, listening for what is said as well as unsaid. To cultivate this habit of closely attending to another requires practice in listening and interpreting the language, voice, and intonations of others' speech. Through such conscious exercise, each of us also becomes more aware of our own speech affect. Every month, we will present narrated stories from the JAMA column A Piece of My Mind because spoken words reveal much about the relationship between patient and physician.

#### **February Patient Story**

Pisetsky DS. [Moments in love](#). *JAMA*. 1996;275(6):433-434.

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## ***Virtual Mentor***

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### **VIEWPOINT**

#### **Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day**

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

- On February 5, 2000, the Chinese will celebrate the beginning of the Year 4698, the Year of the Dragon. According to the Chinese Zodiac, romance and business will dominate the Dragon's agenda this year. The Dragon, which is the most honored zodiac sign represents vitality and power and many Chinese couples will be trying to give birth to a child during this lunar calendar year.
- Until recently, fortune cookies were virtually unknown in China. Though fortune cookies originated in California, the inspiration may have come from 13th-century Chinese soldiers who slipped secret military messages in mooncakes.
- February 14 is the death anniversary of Valentine, a priest and physician, who was beheaded for aiding the Christian martyrs and secretly marrying couples against the wishes of the Roman Emperor in the 3rd century AD.
- Valentine's Day was once called Bird's Wedding Day because it was believed that birds selected their mates and began to breed on this date. Thus, the idea of "love birds" became romantically associated with this holiday.
- Ambergris, a gray, waxy substance, is formed in the intestines of sperm whales and often found floating at sea or washed ashore [1]. The Chinese call it *lung yen*, dragon's spittle, and their nobles drank it as an aphrodisiac to increase male potency. Ambergris was known to Middle Eastern cultures and was often used as medicine to treat ailments for the heart and brain. It was eaten with eggs for breakfast at the tables of English squires. In addition to being used as medicine and spice for foods, ambergris adds to the scent of essential flower oils when introduced into fine perfumes.
- The human vomeronasal organ [2-4] detects pheromones and in turn sends signals to the hypothalamus which regulates reproductive and ingestive behaviors. Not surprisingly, the perfume industry has spent millions of dollars exploring how pheromones could be added to fragrances and cosmetics to excite people's romantic instinct

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### **VIEWPOINT**

**Michael E. DeBakey, MD**

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

In February, the month to celebrate love and romance, we present the first Virtual Mentor Award for being an exemplary role model in medicine to Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, a physician and surgeon who has spent his professional career healing ailing hearts.

Dr. DeBakey earned his medical degree from Tulane University School of Medicine in 1932. After military service in World War II, he worked in the US Surgeon General's Office and is credited with developing MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) units. The establishment of MASH units led to the saving thousands of lives during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

As a pioneer in the field of cardiovascular surgery, Dr. DeBakey's work led to the development of coronary artery bypass operations and heart transplants, which are now common procedures. As a lifelong scholar, he has published hundreds of articles and book chapters on an array of surgical topics, and also spearheaded the movement to establish the National Library of Medicine. As a humanitarian, his expertise has not only saved the lives of kings and heads of state, but also those whose life circumstances are less fortunate.

For his extraordinary embodiment of the art and science of medicine, we are proud to present Dr. DeBakey with the first Virtual Mentor Award.

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD is editor in chief of *Virtual Mentor*

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