

Virtual Mentor
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Upcoming Issues of *Virtual Mentor*

February: Hearts, Anatomical and Other
March: March Madness
April: Web Medicine and Pseudo-Medicine
May: Images of Medicine in Wartime

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CASE AND COMMENTARY

Performing Physical Exams on Fellow Students

Commentary by Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

Case

Mary, a third-year medical student is currently doing an OB/GYN rotation. Her school has often used standardized patients to help medical students become proficient with various examinations. One day, no standardized patient is available. The attending physician suggests that one of the female medical students volunteer so that students can practice pelvic examinations. Mary feels that this is an inappropriate role for a female medical student. She feels that such a request is coercive, considering that their clerkship grade depends on such educational exercises.

Questions for Discussion

1. What should Mary do?
2. How does informed consent apply in these educational circumstances?

See what the AMA *Code of Medical Ethics* says about this topic in Opinion 3.09 Medical Students performing procedures on fellow students. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD is editor in chief 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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IN THE LITERATURE

The Empathic Physician: Nature and Nurture

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.

January Book Chapter

S Glick S. The empathic physician: nature and nurture. In: Spiro H, McCrea Curnen MG, Peschel E, St James D, eds. *Empathy and the Practice of Medicine*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press; 1993:85-102.

Questions for Discussion

- How important is empathy in the patient-physician relationship, as compared with medical expertise?
- How is it related to trust?
- How can empathy be taught to physicians in a way that complements the scientific aspects of medicine?

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

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ART OF MEDICINE

Call for Images of Healing and Learning

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

Healing and learning appear to be paired processes, occurring together throughout human activity. But nowhere are these processes as prominently seen as they are during medical training.

Most any medium can be used to capture a representation of an aspect of healing and learning: the Chinese characters on this page represent the call that appears on banners when medical students graduate to become physicians. It urges them to apply what they have learned to prevent suffering and to heal mankind.

For most students, the medium that most readily lends itself to retaining some visual memory of a succession of fleeting moments is the camera. Through photographs, the highlights of yesterday's happenings remain vivid and communicable to others. The subtle interplay of light and shadow that renders a photograph unique may even be likened to the delicate shifts that characterize interactions between patient and physician or between student and teacher.

We invite students to send photographs portraying aspects of healing and learning. Accompany your photos with a description of what is captured in the image and the special significance the picture has for you. Through these images, students can communicate their personal perspectives on medical training and share their observations and reflections with others.

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PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Through the Patient's Eyes: A Mutual Investment Company

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.

January Patient Story

Morai-Young C. [A mutual investment company.](#) *JAMA*. 1995;273(4):340.

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VIEWPOINT

It's about Time

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

- Horologists refer to the Henry Graves Supercomplication as the "Mona Lisa" of timepieces. Made by Patek Philippe in 1933, this handcrafted pocketwatch features 24 complications, including a perpetual calendar, moon phases, and sidereal time. Sotheby's recently auctioned off the Gates timepiece for a record \$11 million.
- Medical students in only 52 US schools spend time in separate, formal ethics courses during their educational career.
- Residents in pathology worked on average of 48 hours per week, while those in general surgery worked on average of 81 hours per week.
- According to ACGME work-hour guidelines, it is desirable for general surgery residents to have 1 day off a week and be on call no more than every third night.
- General practitioners in Great Britain spend between 5 and 8 minutes in an average office visit, while US physicians spend between 10 to 20 minutes or more [1].
- Technically, the third millennium starts on January 1, 2001. Check your clock against the official US atomic clock and learn the importance of having time accuracy to 1 second in 6 million years.

References

1. Dugdale DC, Epstein R, Pantilat SZ. Time and the patient-physician relationship. *J Gen Intern Med.* 1999;14(suppl 1):S34-S40.

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VIEWPOINT

Sir William Osler, MD

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

Much has been written and spoken to guide healers in the appropriate principles and practices of patient care. Yet, essential as it is for a healer to understand the moral framework of his or her approach to patients, often the best teacher is a living example. For it is through individual speech and behavior that we see ethical precepts translated into the art of healing.

A physician long considered a role model extraordinaire was Sir William Osler, who practiced at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. A great advocate for the value of equanimity or balance, Osler thought that for physicians to practice with a clear head and kind heart, they had to maintain coolness and presence of mind, to remain imperturbable throughout. Today, patients as well as physicians might perceive an unflappable demeanor in a less flattering light, but the cultivation of inner balance may still be a necessary discipline for physicians practicing under stressful circumstances. What are the qualities that students seek in those they identify as role models at the beginning of the 21st century? How different or similar are the qualities these people exemplify from role models of the past?

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