

## *Virtual Mentor*

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### **VIEWPOINT**

#### **Balls, Strikes, and VIPs**

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- July 4, 1939 was Lou Gehrig Day at Yankee Stadium. By then, the public knew that Gehrig, nicknamed the Iron Horse because he had played in 2,130 consecutive games, was stricken with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a progressive neuromuscular disease that is usually fatal within five years of diagnosis. Despite his illness, Gehrig still considered himself "the luckiest man on the face of the earth." Inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame in 1939 after the five-year waiting list was waived due to his illness, Lou Gehrig died on June 2, 1941 in Riverdale, NY.
- Doug Dravecky, a left-handed pitcher for the San Francisco Giants was diagnosed with an osteosarcoma of his left humerus in 1998. Amazingly, Dravecky returned to pitching in the major leagues after undergoing cancer treatment. After recording 2 more wins in his comeback, Dravecky suffered a pathological fracture of his treated left humerus while pitching and ultimately had his left arm amputated in order to treat the cancer.
- As a high school sophomore, Mickey Mantle nearly had his left leg amputated as a result of osteomyelitis, but luckily a new drug called penicillin saved his leg and thus his future baseball career. To many of his admirers, his career was capped in the summer of 1961 when he and Yankee teammate Roger Maris were both chasing Babe Ruth's record of 60 home runs in a single season. Maris ended up breaking the record with 61, while Mantle had 54 homers. Throughout his career, Mantle often played in significant pain due to a chronic muscle ailment.
- After Mantle received a liver transplant in 1995, some claimed that celebrity status played a determining role in his getting a donor organ in a relatively short period of time. In response, the United Network for Organ Sharing conducted an independent review of the circumstances surrounding Mantle's liver transplant. They concluded that, in this highly publicized case, the organ had been allocated properly and according to established policy.
- Concerns about special care of "VIP" patients including famous athletes remain. From the quality-of-care perspective, some criticize the fact that VIP patients get preferential treatment that the average patient might not receive. In many academic health centers where VIP patients come for the latest medical treatments and cures, there are some who feel that the VIP patients should have the same obligation as other patients to participate in the training of medical students and residents<sup>1,2,3</sup>. If this is true, then VIP patients should receive the same respect for privacy and confidentiality

accorded other patients. Apparently this is not always the case, as when non-treating health care personnel access the medical records of VIPs without authorization or apparent need.

### References

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