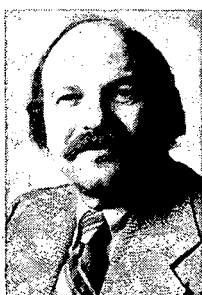


Editor's Page

More On The Measure Of A Man

The troubling consequences of an over-emphasis on the science of medicine, and the relative lack of attention paid to the qualities of character required of a physician, have been pointed out in an earlier editorial with a similar title. (*Detroit Medical News*, October 18, 1976) Being technically competent is a minimum requirement for a physician but by no means enough. In our rush to meet overcrowded schedules in our lives, we frequently fail to remember what being a physician has always meant, and what it still ought to mean even today. With his very demeanor a physician used to provide a steadying and calming influence, he was a man respecting himself and others, neither businessman nor pure scientist. He was a healer, a person concerned with the well being of his patients, both body and soul. Intuition and sensitivity were necessary in establishing the proper diagnosis, and they are still required of the good clinician even when lab tests seem to have all the answers. Dedication, kindness and patience were all important before the advent of antibiotics and other wonder drugs, but they are still essential if physicians are to avoid becoming highly paid mechanics of the body. A physician without respect for life and for all living or without a basic courtesy and understanding is still a contradiction in terms.



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Yet such qualities as courtesy and deference to the sensitivities of other humans are less prevalent now than ever before. Some even consider such qualities signs of weakness and are embarrassed when appearing to possess them. Contrary to wide-spread belief, gracious living and good manners are more a matter of character than they are the function of money or class. Angry, bitter and bullying attitudes are common, but they are not necessary ingredients of racial struggles and class wars, both of which could be conducted like actual wars: with the observation of basic, minimal, humanitarian considerations. The principles of the Geneva Convention are now often ignored internationally, as our own battles on the home-front are frequently marked by inappropriate and uncalled for ugliness.

When a fellow physician insultingly dubs the collective judgment of an editorial board as "drivel," it not only demeans the one who does so, but it is also an unfavorable reflection on the society that allows this to happen without generalized revulsion. Similarly, when sarcastic, bully-like tactics are used to intimidate those quieter and more self-respectful, it encourages further outbursts of unreasonableness and rudeness. Crudity makes its appearance only as long as civilized society tolerates it. Some apparently find it easiest to be belligerent and inconsiderate, and proclaim these as indications of freedom, self-assertion and "doing one's thing." When differences are resolved without dignity or mutual respect and the least reasonable are allowed to prevail, all are losers.

A refreshing and sharp contrast to such antics is provided by the presence among us of many physicians whose human qualities even outshine their honorable medical careers. One such man is William S. Reveno, M.D., whose pearls of wisdom "On the Run" have appeared regularly on these pages since 1933. Dr. Ralph A. Johnson, a one-time editor of the *Detroit Medical News*, wrote a brief comment when Volume II of Bill Reveno's *711 Medical Maxims* appeared in print some fifteen years ago. "Here is maturity of judgment, keenness of observation, and years of clinical experiences distilled into graceful words." In contrast he described many long-winded articles in medical journals as having "sentences rich in otiose obscurities and replete with verbose vacillating vacuities [that] swamp every page." If Bill Reveno displayed maturity then, it is surely present now.

Volume III of *711 Medical Maxims* has just appeared in print, forty-three years after they first saw the light of day. Miguel De Cervantes once said that "a proverb is a short sentence based on long experience." These brief maxims often display a great deal of medical knowledge as well as seasoned wisdom. "Life," we are told, "is a self-limited disease characterized by remissions and exacerbations." Reveno also reminds us that "the expert is rarely in doubt, yet often in error," and like many of us he notes a "paradox: we isolate and deny freedom to the individual with a communicable disease to protect his neighbors, yet zealously release restrictions on the criminal and quarantine the rest of the community."

And yet, it is not Bill Reveno's charming little volume that is being celebrated here now. He himself is. Imperfect like the rest of us, limited by the boundaries of his courage, sometimes in error, yet always human. It is customary to eulogize a man when he is dead, but it is perhaps more useful to do so when he is still very much alive. The example of his being, as that of others like him, makes it easier to bear the occasional abuse of those who lack similar qualities of character.

711 Medical Maxims deserves to be read by every physician. It contains many reminders of what may have been forgotten, or facts that have been overlooked in the first place. More importantly, Bill Reveno and his volume both serve as timely and welcome reminders of those qualities and traditions for which Medicine rightly deserves so much credit.

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