

EDITORIAL

FORWARD UROLOGY FOR THE PRACTITIONER

Living up to the best tradition of our medical profession

“We must first master our field and then maintain our proficiency through lifelong study. We must care for each of our patients as unique human beings. We must go beyond what is simply our duty. And we must always put the welfare of our patients above our own welfare.”

H. Brownell Wheeler, MD

When Dr Birbari asked me to serve as guest editor to this supplement of the Lebanese Medical Journal entitled “Urology for the Practitioner,” he brought back memories of 25 years ago when I was a medical student and I chose to become a urologic surgeon. At that time, Dr Birbari portrayed the image of the perfect physician-scientist. While fully engaged in research, he found ample time to manage his very busy clinical practice. By finding the correct blend of basic research and clinical medicine (sub-specialized in nephrology and hypertension), he obtained the highest respect of specialists in the region, and continues until today to be on the cutting edge of medicine. I was attracted to the field of kidney disease first by Dr Adel Birbari and later by the late Dr Raja Khoury. Later on, and under the influence and charm of the late Dr Bahij Azouri, the founder of modern urology in Lebanon, and followed by Dr Kamal Hemady, who established the first urologic residency in the region, I knew that urology would be my future career.

The field of urology consists of a wide spectrum of diseases and spans across the medical and surgical management of patients with ailments of the genitourinary track. The kidney is the center of the human physiology ; every urologist must master its understanding beyond the technical aspects of surgery, and apply this knowledge to the full care of the patients. Similarly, every internist and medical specialist must fully comprehend the basics of genitourinary anatomy and physiology, to better serve the patient as a whole. Urology is a true example of the blend and overlap of surgery and internal medicine.

The past twenty years have witnessed several advances in the field of urology. To name a few, these include :

1. The development of Extra Corporeal Shockwave Lithotripsy
2. The introduction of Cyclosporine and Calcineurin inhibitors in renal transplantation
3. The finding of PSA as a marker for prostate cancer
4. Refinements in the technique of radical surgery for prostate cancer, and the evolution of nerve sparing radical prostatectomy
5. Advances in endourology and ureteroscopic lithotripsy
6. The evolution of laparoscopic urological surgery
7. The introduction of medical therapy for BPH
8. The understanding of erectile dysfunction and the introduction of phosphodiesterase inhibitor oral therapy
9. Progress in the field of microsurgery for male infertility and assisted insemination
10. The demonstration of effective chemotherapy for bladder cancer, testicular cancer and recently for prostate cancer.

With this progress in urology, and at the same time, the medical health care delivery has evolved to a well structured albeit a very efficient business, perhaps to absorb the ever expanding costs of health care with the ever increasing specialization. With this expansion, many physicians are finding themselves restricted between having to deliver the best and most expeditious care to their patients, and working within a confined cost-contained health care system that requires an enormous amount of paperwork and insurance clearance. Physicians everywhere experience delays or obstacles in patient’s approval, pre-approval, post-approval, and even hurdles in internal approval by the same system that should support them New rules are being

set, increasing the ever charged paperwork that faces a modern clinician. Is it possible for the physician to practice, and more importantly enjoy the specialty in the current medical climate that haunts us ? Is it possible for the physician to progress and continue learning and mastering the field while he is fully engaged with his patients ? Is it possible for the medical profession to survive amidst a milieu of increasing bureaucracy and overregulation ?

The answers to the above is yes, and was clearly conveyed by H. Brownell Wheeler some fifteen years ago, in the Centennial Shattuck Lecture – Healing and Heroism, delivered to the Massachusetts Medical Society on May 24, 1990 [1]. *“Despite the significant scientific achievements of our profession, the societal malaise currently affects health care.”* The best way to face this malaise is to follow in the footsteps of Dr William Osler (1849-1919) who was a dominant medical figure of his day and who is still regarded as the preeminent physician of modern times. Wheeler emphasized three personal ideals that were developed by Osler and that we must live by :

1. Do each day’s work well and not to bother about tomorrow.
2. Live out the Golden Rule.
3. Cultivate equanimity.

Dr Wheeler strongly believes that the values exemplified by Osler could probably save our profession, and the lack of emphasis on these values currently threatens our profession *“far more than the socioeconomic problems facing us and about which we worry so much.”* To Osler, *“the medical profession is honored above all others and it is a profession that calls upon the highest powers of mind and brings the physician into warm and personal contact with his fellow human being.”* Osler was a master clinician and a great physician, who was superbly competent by the standards of his time. He remained a lifelong student and a prolific writer, and has a bibliography that contains 1476 citations. *“But competence alone is not enough.”* Osler described medicine as *“an art, albeit one based on science,”* according to Wheeler. The practice of medicine is in itself a heroic profession to Wheeler. It is best exemplified in American medicine by the figure of Osler, who is regarded as its greatest hero. *“Osler genuinely believed in the power of optimism and faith. He represented the spiritual, as well as the physical basis for healing. To the body of medical knowledge, Osler added a soul.”*

In the Centennial Shattuck Lecture, Dr Wheeler emphasized that we can still learn much from the Osler myth which calls us to live up to the best traditions of our profession : *“the formula is simple in concept but difficult in practice. We must first master our field and then maintain our proficiency through lifelong study. We must care for each of our patients as unique human being. We must go beyond what is simply our duty, and we must always put the welfare of our patients above our own welfare.”* The medical profession cannot be successfully maintained when driven purely by financial considerations, and *“we need to remember that happiness in our profession comes primarily from service to others.”* *“To the extent that we live up to the Osler hero-myth, our profession will prosper. To the extent that we fail to follow his path, our profession will fail.”*

I hope that this supplement of urology for the internist, written by renowned colleagues from United States, Europe and the Middle East, could provide the practitioner with a handy reference on the ailments of the urinary tract, and a practical guide for managing the urologic patient.

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Guest Editor

1. Wheeler B. Shattuck Lecture – Healing and Heroism. The New England Journal of Medicine 1990 ; 322 (21) : 1540-8.

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