

Doctor without a Watch

Looking at the Changes in Medicine

PREFACE

I am a ninety-nine-year-old retired physician. Although I closed my medical office in 1992, my interest in the practice of medicine and science continues. In 2004, I published my ideas about the eye, the thyroid, radioactivity and the atom in *Scientist without a Laboratory*.

Since I retired, the advances in medicine have been spectacular but the practice of medicine is also going through several disturbing changes. Television has started to play an inordinately prominent role in giving people medical advice. Each of the countless commercials for wondrous cures always ends with the words, “See your doctor.”

As far as I can remember, my mother wanted me to become a doctor. I have no recollection of my first years in England, where I was born, or our passage to the United States, but I remember my first-grade teacher, Miss Packard, telling me with a warm smile that I was going to be a doctor. Becoming a doctor was a foregone conclusion. I graduated from Tufts Medical School with an MD “cum laude” in 1933. After thirteen years of government and army service, I opened my own office for the private practice of medicine in Manchester, Connecticut, in November 1946. In November 1992, I retired after my wife had a heart attack and needed cardiac surgery.

During my forty-six years of practice in Manchester, I was an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist. That type of specialty does not exist any more. Instead, it is today divided into ophthalmology and otolaryngology. Being from the old school, I was both an ophthalmologist and an otolaryngologist. Medically this is a vast territory but the area is very small. Except for the two ears that stand out on either side of the head, the face covers it all.

When I had to describe a problem to a patient, I drew sketchy diagrams of the involved area and of the

procedures I was going to perform. If the patient was a child, or if a child accompanied an adult patient, I usually tried to interest the child in the explanation. This, of course, took time, so the busier I became, the more I was behind schedule. Therefore I decided to stop wearing a watch. Not knowing what time it was, I was able to give my patients as much time as they needed.

Even more so today, time pressure has become an issue in health care practices. A new development in medical practice, which has not received a lot of public attention, has been the appearance of “hospitalists” – hospital-based general physicians who assume the inpatient care of patients in the place of their primary care physician.

In this book, I write about how I became a doctor, my experiences as an eye, ear, nose and throat doctor, and about the positive and negative changes I have seen in medicine since I started practicing as a physician seventy-five years ago. I also write about my own experiences as a patient in the care of hospitalists.

In this book I tell my story, share my views and raise my concerns about medicine today. I have written *Doctor without a Watch* for a general audience—my former

patients, other doctors and doctors-to-be, students of medicine and healthcare, and, of course, my family and friends.

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