



**Anil Nanda, M.D.**

Professor and Chairman, Department of Neurosurgery  
Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport

## Curiosity, Compassion, and Composure

**Anil Nanda**

**A white coat ceremony is held to honor each medical school class as they transition from the study of preclinical medicine to clinical medicine. This prestigious milestone is a turning point in their progress toward becoming medical doctors. White coat ceremonies are held in many institutions across the country to signify each student's passage from the realm of strictly academic learning to one of clinical experience.**

**D**ear Class of 2011, members of the faculty of LSU, and families,

I am deeply honored to deliver the white coat ceremony talk here today, and because we are in a former convent, my wife gave me permission to crack one Catholic joke. Cardinal Connor was well known in New York, and when he finally passed away, he ascended to heaven and St. Peter greeted him at the pearly gates. Cardinal Connor, in all his regalia, was hoping to go straight in without standing in line, when St. Peter interrupted him and said, "No, you will have to wait in line just like everyone else." So Cardinal Connor then goes to the back of the line and patiently waited for several hours. He then saw somebody appear in a lab coat and go past everyone to the front of the line. He was somewhat irate and asked St. Peter, "How is the doctor allowed to get away with this?" St. Peter smiled and said, "Oh, just ignore that. That's just God playing Doctor."

As you embark on your clinical rotations, I would like to touch upon three things that will be relevant and important to you as clinical practitioners. The three things are curiosity, composure, and compassion.

In 1678, there was an Italian physician by the name of Bernardino Ramazzini, from Carpi. He is considered the father of occupational

medicine, but what he brought to this field was a sense of curiosity. He had noted that nuns had a very high incidence of breast cancer, and he realized that because they did not have children, he conjectured a possible link between lactation and breast cancer. In those days, people would have eight to ten children, and we now know that pregnancy has a protective effect against breast cancer. He was intrigued and came up with this seminal observation about breast cancer and pregnancy (**Figure 1**) (8). He also found a connection between chimney sweepers and skin cancer, as well as evidence that "chair workers," such as cobblers and tailors" (8) are more prone to lumbago.

This thread of curiosity weaves through the history of medicine. Dr. Lawrence Craven was a University of Michigan internist who was a private practitioner in California in the late 1940s (**Figure 2**). At that time, children would have aspirin bubble gum, and he noticed that when children came to have tonsillectomies, they tended to bleed a lot if they chewed gum frequently. He then took that concept further; he felt that if myocardial infarction or heart attacks happened in middle-aged men, putting them on aspirin may make their blood thinner and prevent them from having heart attacks. He followed 3000 of his own patients and reported the first series in which the incidence of myocardial infarction declined with aspirin (1). He was astute enough to make a simple observation. He did not have an NIH-funded laboratory or statisticians working for him. By the pure power of simple observation, he made an important finding in aspirin. Today, most men older than the age of 50 will take a daily aspirin.

In more recent times, we have seen Marshall and Warren, two practitioners in distant Australia. Marshall was a pathologist, and Warren was a gastroenterologist who wanted to do research with him. Dr. Marshall had found helio-bacteria in patient with stomach ulcers and wanted to pursue an infectious etiology for peptic ulcers

### Key words

- Ceremony
- Tradition
- White Coat



Department of Neurosurgery, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Shreveport, Shreveport, Louisiana, USA

This address was given at the White Coat Ceremony for the class of 2011 at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport in March of 2009.

To whom correspondence should be addressed: Anil Nanda, M.D.

[E-mail: [ananda@lsuhsc.edu](mailto:ananda@lsuhsc.edu)]

Citation: *World Neurosurg.* (2012) 78, 1/2:14-17.

DOI: 10.1016/j.wneu.2011.04.004

Journal homepage: [www.WORLDNEUROSURGERY.org](http://www.WORLDNEUROSURGERY.org)

Available online: [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

1878-8750/\$ - see front matter Published by Elsevier Inc.

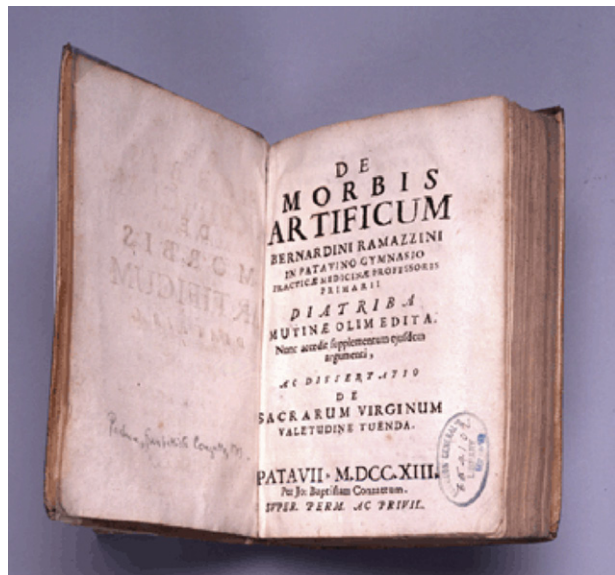


Figure 1. *De Morbis Artificum*, by Bernardino Ramazzini.

(5). This was complete heresy in those days, and they were mocked when they initially did their research; however, they persevered and were ultimately able to prove that helio-bacteria did cause ulceration. In fact, Dr. Warren inoculated himself with helio-bacteria and went on to get an ulcer to prove his diagnosis. This completely changed the management of peptic ulcers from multiple operations, including vagotomies, to a simple course of antibiotics.

When Dr. Marshall was asked how he was able to question such a sacred tenet, he answered, “I prefer to believe my eyes, not medical textbooks or the medical fraternity” (5). Subsequently, Marshall and Warren were awarded the Nobel Prize in 2005. This was the same streak of curiosity that Dr. Ramazzini and Dr. Craven exhibited, thereby enabling them to make exciting discoveries in medicine and change the way we practice this wonderful art.

We now go to composure, which is so vital in what we do. Having composure was first emphasized by Sir William Osler when he said in his speech to the University of Pennsylvania graduates of 1890 (7) that “[t]hou must be like a promontory of the sea, against which, though the waves beat continually, yet it both itself stands, and about it are those swelling waves stilled and quieted.” This was from Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, and he used this as an



Figure 2. Lawrence Craven.  
Courtesy of University of Minnesota Archives.



Figure 3. The painting “The Surrender of General Lee to General Grant, April 9, 1865” by Louis Guillaume (1867). Courtesy of the Appomattox Court House National Historic Park.

important ingredient for medical composure. The same sentiments were echoed in Kipling’s poem (4), when he said, “If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster/And treat those two impostors just the same; . . . Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,/And—which is more—you’ll be a Man my son!” This was described in ancient India more than 2000 years ago, when the Upanishads proclaimed in Sanskrit, “Ma bhaya ma samviktha,” which means, “Neither daunted in defeat, nor triumphant in victory.” (2)

This composure can be traced historically on multiple occasions. When Pausanias, the King of Sparta, defeats the Persian army in a landmark victory in Platia, the fellow Spartans urge him to decapitate the losing General Mardonius. They wanted revenge for the death and decapitation of Leonidas at Thermopylae and urged him to do the same, but Pausanias refused. He said, “Such actions are more fit for barbarians than Greeks, and even in them we find it a matter of offense. For conduct such as this, God forbid that I should find favor with any who approve such acts! It is enough for me to please the men of Sparta by decent acts and decent words” (9). Such impeccable composure at a time of victory applies to the field of medicine as well.

Moving on to an important date in American history, on April 9, 1865, the Civil War finally came to an end. General Lee and General Grant had fought for many years with more than half a million casualties. This is the bloodiest war that the United States ever witnessed. When they finally get together at Appomattox, it was a very civil meeting. For the first half hour, General Grant just asked General Lee, “Weren’t you in the Mexican War?” At this stage, Lee had only two requests; he would like his men to be able to keep the horses they had, and he would like his men to be fed (3). After such a particularly sanguine war, there is such a sense of calm and composure (Figure 3).

This surrender scene is so beautifully described by Shelby Foote in his book on the Civil War when he says, “Grief brought a sort of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3096711>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3096711>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)