



Dermatologic Disquisitions and Other Essays
Edited by Philip R. Cohen, MD

Pressure and disenchantment in physicians—Part I: Developing an approach to reconnect with what is noble about medicine ☆, ☆ ☆



Clay J. Cockerell, MD*

Director Division of Dermatopathology, Cockerell Dermatopathology Laboratory, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, Texas

Founder and Medical Director, Cockerell Dermatopathology, Dallas, TX

Southwestern Director Division Dermatopathology, Department of Dermatology, University of Texas, Dallas, TX

Abstract Physicians are faced with many stressors today that place them at risk of disenchantment, depression, and burnout. Although this is costly to the individual physician, it is equally costly to society, because physician stress can lead to exercise of poor judgment and medical errors. It also threatens to exacerbate physician shortages, as more physicians opt to retire or, in some cases, change careers altogether. In this essay, suggestions are made as to how to deal with these stressors that, if used, can ameliorate them at least to some degree. In a companion essay, a Chinese spiritual text, the Tao Te Ching, will be explored in depth as yet another tool that physicians can use as a guide for living with less stress.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Physicians today are faced with many pressures, perhaps more than in previous generations. In 2014, I hosted an educational conference in Colorado that was attended by a number of my former trainees, and I was distressed to hear that some of them express frustration, even to the point that several noted that they were considering a career change or retiring at a

relatively early point in their careers. In an effort to deal with this, at least in a small way, I conducted a forum at the American Academy of Dermatology meeting in San Francisco (March 24, 2015) about ways physicians, dermatologists included, can develop techniques to deal with “burnout” and hopefully reconnect with why we chose medicine as a profession. This contribution and the one to be published subsequently were written at the invitation of my friend Philip Cohen so that they could be shared with a wider audience.

Challenges currently faced by physicians

An essay published by *Medical Economics* recently listed 15 challenges facing physicians today.¹ These include ICD-

☆ Edited by Philip R. Cohen, MD

☆☆ Please submit contributions to the section to Philip R. Cohen, MD, at mitehead@gmail.com.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-214-530-5200.

E-mail address: ccockerell@dermpath.com.

10 implementation, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance, Meaningful Use 2, the Affordable Care Act's impact on reimbursement, maintenance of certification, collecting co-pays and deductibles, administrative burdens, rising operational costs, pay for performance, independence versus performance, payers dictating health care, patients dictating health care, keeping pace with technology, staff retention, and avoiding liability. Any one of these could be enough to cause serious issues with an individual practice. Having as many as 15 such challenges indicates the dire situation that many physicians feel they are in today.

Physician disenchantment

In addition to these, many physicians are disenchanting with medicine in general and feel that the professionalism of colleagues is in decline. They also bemoan unrealistic expectations from patients and society—specifically, an unrealistic expectation of perfection versus an appreciation of excellence. They echo the issues noted in the paper cited earlier and specifically mention fear of legal liability, government, and third party payers interfering with their practices and large corporations and hospitals consolidating practices and altering them as chief issues. As a consequence, fewer physicians are opting to enter private practice and are instead joining existing organizations and hospitals. Older physicians are electing to retire from practice earlier than they otherwise might have.¹¹

Given that many physicians, dermatologists included, feel pressure and disenchantment, what are some ways that can be used to deal with this?

Medicine: Still a noble profession

First of all, medicine is still a noble profession and affords the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. In spite of everything else, this remains true and is something that can be connected with and used as a grounding source when faced with discouragement.

This is not about blind optimism. It is not about religion or faith. It is about developing an approach to reconnect with what is noble about medicine, and dermatology in particular, which is the most sought after specialty in medicine. I personally believe that there is a natural law that says there is a direct relationship between the amount of service we provide to the degree of our success, happiness, and impact on others. As physicians, we are by definition servants of our patients and society. By providing maximum service, we have an opportunity to practice this law and reap rewards as a consequence.

Meditation

Many of the recommendations in these 2 essays are personal and things that I have found helpful for me. Some may not

resonate with you; others may be very meaningful. I am not portraying myself as any type of "enlightened" individual or "guru." I am a poor practitioner of much of what I write here; however, I find when I become stressed or "off center," I use many of the tools discussed herein, in addition to reading the verses of Tao Te Ching, an ancient Chinese spiritual text that I shall elaborate on in more detail in a subsequent essay. I also find meditation to be helpful and soothing.²

Dr. Wayne Dyer

I am an avid fan of Dr. Wayne Dyer. Dr. Dyer is a psychologist and a pioneer in the positive psychology movement, having written many books and created many audio and video programs. He is internationally renowned and has written a book specifically about the Tao Te Ching.³ In fact, he spent an entire year living according to each one of the 81 verses and created a program reflecting his experience. If you are not familiar with his work, I highly recommend seeking him out. I have been very impressed with his messages and have had the good fortune of hearing him speak in person.

David Harp

As noted earlier, I also recommend meditating, at least to a small degree. Some individuals are meditation devotees and have the ability to enter deep meditative states. I am not one of them; however, there are ways of doing short mindfulness exercises and short meditations throughout the day. Asking busy physicians to take 30 minutes or more each day to sit in solitude, monitoring their breathing, is not realistic for many of us; however, I have found that short "checking in" mindfulness sessions can be very helpful and refreshing. I recommend a book by David Harp, *The Three Minute Mediator*.⁴ It is short, witty, and humorous but with an important message nonetheless.

The need for self-compassion

Many, if not most, physicians are perfectionistic, are controlling, and tend to be quite hard on themselves. They do not practice self-compassion. This can lead to depression and burnout; thus, we need to be more compassionate toward ourselves. This does not come naturally for many of us, myself included. We are taught from an early age to put others first and not to be selfish. We are taught that to love oneself is to be narcissistic.

By being loving of oneself, I am not advocating being "ego-selfish": behaviors that feed the ego and are not service-oriented but based in scarcity and "survival" mode. I am advocating honoring the divine spirit that lives within each

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3193948>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3193948>

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