

REMARKS
ORIENTATION. JUNE 2007
DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

Now that your heads are spinning-- if not "brain dead-- from orientation it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Department of Medicine. Salvador Dali reportedly gave an address of which the entirety was "I will be so brief that I am already done now." I promise to be succinct.

In these circumstances I feel a little bit like Elizabeth Taylor's 7th husband on their wedding night; he allegedly said "I know what I'm supposed to do, but I don't know if I can make it interesting." My challenge in the next few minutes is to attempt to capture and hold your attention, inspire you, articulate my philosophy of medicine, convey to you the expectations of the department of medicine, and leave you with clear, simple, memorable principles to guide you.

I want to tell you all that that I consider important by way of a story. The story is of a monastery, once thriving, that had fallen on hard times. Few monks were left, all elderly. Its vibrancy, its influence, its attractiveness to novices had all eroded. It happened that deep in the surrounding woods was a small hut used occasionally as a hermitage by a rabbi from a nearby town. The abbot thought to seek the rabbi's advice. The rabbi welcomed the abbot to the hut and commiserated. The old friends embraced, read scripture together, prayed together, and wept together. As he was about to leave, the abbot asked "is there nothing I can do?" The rabbi replied "no, I have no advice for you. The only thing I can say is that one of you is the messiah." The abbot returned to his monastery and related the rabbi's strange message to his brethren. They all wondered what the rabbi had meant. Was it really possible that the messiah was one of them? It must be father abbot. Perhaps he meant brother Thomas, who seemed so holy. Certainly it could not be crotchety brother Phillip, although he has a gift for being there when needed. Surely the rabbi didn't mean me; oh please God, not me. As they contemplated in this manner the old monks began to treat one another with extraordinary respect, on the chance that one of them really was the messiah. And they began treating themselves with extraordinary respect, for the same reason. Slowly, the monastery began to change. The occasional visitor noticed that it was again a special place, a place where people enjoyed one another, where visitors were welcomed and embraced, where there was intellectual excitement, where there was studying and learning and teaching, where there was passion and zeal, and, yes, where there was mutual respect. Soon younger visitors stayed longer to be with the monks. First one asked if he could join them, then another, and another. Soon the monastery was again a vibrant community, a beacon of spirituality and light.

Medicine-- indeed the world-- would be better if we acted as if one of us might be the messiah. This is how medicine should be practiced and life lived, as if all of

us have the spark or spirit of god within. It is we who can redeem medicine, in large part by behaving in this way.

if you remember this, and live this, as residents, you will be great. It's all about being the best that you can be. The secret of taking care of patients is in caring for the patient. This means that the sick never inconvenience the well. It means we look at all patients as learning opportunities; we don't fear admissions nor do we ever denigrate our patients; patients are people with rich histories and lives, not cases, not "hits", not "gomers", not "frequent fliers", not "the MI in room 12". It means we treat others as we would wish to be treated, collegially. It means we are meticulous, compulsive, and complete; it means that we carefully document everything we do. It means that we ask questions when we don't know. It means we embrace scholarly effort, intellectual curiosity honesty, integrity, altruism, and service. It means we respect our obligation to teach and learn, because that makes us better doctors better able to care for our patients. It means we realize we must challenge ourselves and others and make everyone better for it. It means exploiting every moment of every educational opportunity as a chance to learn and improve. It means identifying role models for ourselves and being role models for others. It means taking initiative and not being passive. It means working together, in teams. It means understanding that life isn't always fair and that fair isn't always equal. It means we realize that residency is more than just showing up. It means we are accountable for what we do. It means we understand that professionals fulfill their "citizenship" responsibilities, like completing charts in a timely manner, like not leaving our conference rooms in disarray, like being on time and at all required educational and other activities. It means we dress professionally at all times ("scrubs" are not professional attire in the department of medicine during normal work hours) when seeing patients, because that reflects our respect for our patients and ourselves. Similarly it means we don't eat or drink when seeing patients or making rounds, as that too is neither professional nor respectful. It means also that we in the department of medicine don't accept gifts-- food, drink, pens, pencils, note pads, books, or anything else-- from drug companies because doing so violates professional and ethical precepts.

Remember the story of monks, as you go about residency. Learn from it and abide by its message. Respect yourselves, your colleagues, your patients, and your profession. Last, remember there are 3 types of people-- those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wake up and wonder what's happening. Makes things happen. Have fun. Do this and you will excel, make the most of your residency, be good doctors, earn the respect of your patients and colleagues, be proud of yourselves, and make us proud of you.