

ORIENTATION 2004

Remember the following ten basic thoughts and keep them with you to reflect upon from time to time throughout your residency.

1. "There is a time for all things (Ecclesiastes)." Learn things in their time and in context. It takes energy to learn; don't waste it. For example, set aside everything you just heard in orientation! It is all important, but not now. You will learn it when it is necessary for you to know those things.
2. The most important thing to remember is "it's the patient, stupid" (J. Sargent, M.D.). Do what's in your patients' best interest, and you will never be wrong, nor should you ever be faulted. Treat your patients with the same care and respect as if they were your loved ones or family. "I never feel sorry for the doctor." "The sick never inconvenience the well (E. A. Stead, M.D.)."
3. "Care for people, not illness (E. A. Stead, M.D.)." There are never "uninteresting" patients, only uninterested, unimaginative, unprofessional physicians who do not challenge themselves to understand and help the individuals for whom they care and find a way to learn something from every encounter. There is no specialty of medicine that deals exclusively with "interesting" patients.
4. Life is hard, and often unfair. Don't complain. Don't whine. Don't compare your circumstance with another's. Exploit the special educational opportunities you have during residency; you will never have these experiences again. When you have a bad day because you are tired, stressed, overworked, and underappreciated,

never forget that things are much worse for the person on the other end of the stethoscope. Your day may be lousy, but you don't have pancreatic cancer. Learn to deal with grief, failure, and disappointment. Cheer is not what everyone is expecting from you; your patients and their families may just be seeking support, a friendly hand, or a caring soul.

5. Think. Education is what's left when you forget the facts. Most of what you learn will soon become obsolete. Learn how to learn, and learn how to think. Learning is necessary but not always sufficient. Thinking leads you to new questions and answers.

6. Question. Challenge what you learn and what you have been taught. Questions are more important than answers. Never be afraid to ask. Never be afraid to admit your ignorance. Never be afraid to be wrong. If you knew all the answers, you wouldn't be here as residents. Learn to cope with uncertainty. "The essence of medicine is the reduction of uncertainty".

7. Care. Remember to care for your patients foremost. Outside your family, there are no more intimate ties than between doctors and patients. Care also for your loved ones. Assure you make time for them and that they support your educational goals. Care too for one another. Medicine is not only clinical work but also concerned with relationships, teamwork, systems, communication skills, research, publishing, and critical appraisal. Your residency will be easier and more enjoyable shared with family, friends, and colleagues.

8. Have fun. Residency is a special, unique, albeit difficult, time. Make the most of it. Exploit it. You will never do this again (hopefully). Maintain passion for what you do. "An inquiring, analytical mind; an unquenchable thirst for new knowledge; and a heartfelt compassion for the ailing – these are the prominent traits among committed clinicians who have preserved their passion for medicine."

9. Be yourself at all times. Maintain the same ethics and principles you believed in when you started. Cultivate "aequanimatas" (equanimity, imperturbability, calmness, clarity, impartiality) (W. Osler, M.D.), and add to it a dose of passion.

10. In one pocket keep a message that says "you are just dust and ashes"; in the other pocket keep a message that says "the world was created just for you"; both messages are true.