

Fast and Slow
Stethoscope Ceremony
24 August 2015
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Welcome to our sixth U of T Stethoscope Ceremony. This whole week is designed to welcome you to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. Tonight, we want to welcome our new students to the PROFESSION of Medicine

First, I have some questions for the new students. Who has ever seen an episode of *House*? *Grey's Anatomy*? *Scrubs*?

I have sad news: this is real life and this is a real medical school. It's not *House* — brilliance (not that he is brilliant) does not excuse any behaviour. It's not *Grey's* — boundaries exist, and sex is not the primary motivator. It's not *Scrubs* — it will not be a farce (although there will be joyful as well as sad times.)

This is a real medical school. There are expectations. When you get to clinical rotations you will find the term "Meets Expectations" to be very important and in addition to knowledge expectations there will be Professional expectations.



In previous years at these ceremonies, I have talked about trust and respect, about keeping well, about putting the patient first, about appropriate gratitude to the patients who will help you learn medicine, and about staying humble.

This year, let's think about time and its effect on professional behaviour and on learning.

My colleague Bob Byrick comments that in medicine there are go-fast times and go-slow times. It is easy to think of the go-fast times: when a trauma patient is bleeding profusely, when there is need for urgent caesarean section, when there is an acute anaphylactic reaction, and you can all think of many more. In these instances, quick and effective action can mean the difference between healthy survival and serious disability or death.

The go-slow times in clinical practice are not as dramatic, but they are just as important: listening to a troubled teen, stitching a heart valve, telling a patient and their family bad news. You will experience so-called production pressure in clinical practice: there is always more to do and demands that will make you think there is not enough time and will tempt you to rush. But you must identify the times when you need to slow yourself down; to think about what you are doing; to reflect on your decisions; to take some time.

Patients will take for granted that you have the knowledge and technical skills to do your job. They will be grateful that you know how to treat their illness, for an operation well done, for the relief of pain, for a life saved. But what they will also remember and value is the time you spend with them to listen to their concerns; to treat them as people, not objects; the time to engage in a partnership of a patient and a doctor with a common goal.

So if there are go-fast and go-slow times in clinical practice, what about in medical school? It is no secret that in the next four years you have a huge amount to learn. In 1380 days from now (or 33,114 hours from right now – there’s an app that counts them) you will be crossing the stage of Convocation Hall to get your MD degree. How will you do it? There is so much to learn, so much to understand, so much to do. For some of it, it will pretty much be hard work and packing facts into memory. (Don’t worry; you have demonstrated that you can do that.) That’s the equivalent of the go-fast time.

The danger is not finding the go-slow times, the time to consolidate and reflect, the time to recall why you are learning all these things. The danger is to forget that the knowledge and skill are not the ends in themselves. The end is excellent and compassionate patient care. And to achieve the goal of becoming a caring and compassionate physician you need to take time. Take time to reflect on what you learn but also take time for yourself. Take the time to be healthy, to have relationships, and to maintain interests outside of science and medicine.

You will find that 1380 days is more than enough to do what you need to do. There is time to learn and time for other things. As in music, you will need different tempos at different times. Not only in practice, but in learning and life, the go-fast times will usually present themselves. Remember to look for and value the go-slow times too.



STETHOSCOPE CEREMONY

So now we come to the stethoscope ceremony. As you know, some medical schools have a white coat ceremony for new students but there are some of us here who are uncomfortable with the white coat as a symbol of the profession. We fear that it emphasizes differences between the doctor and the patient. It can set doctors, and medical students, apart. It can be seen as elitist.

Instead of the white coat, we have chosen the stethoscope, an essential tool in many areas of practice, to function tonight as our symbol of the profession. It is only functional if there is a person at each end – and it is all about listening.

Throughout your career, remember the symbolism of the stethoscope: listen; show respect; remember it’s always about the patient; and don’t miss those important go-slow times.