

Gratitude and Generosity

Category: Aging

written by Joseph Fennelly | February 17, 2020

After fifty-six years of practicing primary internal medicine, I retired in my ninetieth year. The goodbyes and well wishes were only the tip of an iceberg in which my patients and I shared the journey of their illnesses together, and I was honored to serve as a guide in their odyssey.

I have been a witness to their battles and am moved by their medals of honor for living with and through their pain and suffering, sometimes unto death. It is nearly impossible to put into words the depth of what we in the profession of medicine are privileged to experience. This includes the natural practice of doing what is now called "grief counseling" for surviving family members.

While the whole world is a stage and we elderly are in and on that last stage, there remains an opportunity to perform on that timeworn stage; to listen, to heal through listening, to call forth the multiple human connections developed over years of practice and to deepen and enrich our ongoing relationships with others and with the world at large.

My patients have taught me, prepared me, gifted me the strength to experience my necessary decline with more gratitude and generosity.

It remains a constant and difficult task to walk the walk of the talk. Yet the practice of medicine has privileged and prepared me to live more fully until I die.

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