

Commencement Address

Love: The Basis of Practicing Good Medicine

Jake Foglio, M.Div., assistant professor emeritus, Department of Family Practice, specialized in teaching spirituality and medicine to medical students from 1986 to his retirement in 1999.

Thank you, CHM Class of 2000, for inviting me to participate in this festive day that celebrates both a completion and a beginning in your medical career. I am humbled and honored to address all of you today; I feel that being here completes a circle, having addressed you in the first week of your medical school education four years ago as well as individually or in class over the past four years. The subject, directly or indirectly, on all these occasions has, and will today, concern love.

The College of Human Medicine is committed to the admission, matriculation, and graduation of humane physicians. You graduates, now doctors, would not be here this morning, even if academically and clinically competent, had you demonstrated an unwillingness, indifference, or inability to be humane.

To be human presumes the ability to love. It does not seem to be exaggeration or hyperbole, therefore, to presume that the practice of love is an essential component of competence for the physician graduate of this unique College of Human Medicine.

Those of you in the entering CHM class of 1996 were the first medical school class in this College to participate in the recommendations of the CHM Task Force on Student Professional Behavior. The task force, comprised of all constituencies of our College, was convened by Dr. Ruth Hoppe and met from the summer of 1994 to the summer of 1995. In May 1996, three months before you arrived on campus, a retreat of representatives of the entire College met to consider "concrete actions to further the development of medical students as virtuous health professionals."

Associate Dean Hoppe, with the approval and support of Dean Abbett,

committed the College to the process of professionalization with this statement, "The development of our students in the moral dimension of their lives as health care professionals is as important to us as the development of the knowledge and skill competencies we work so hard to achieve."

You doctors have been called and trained to be virtuous physicians. Virtue, as understood in our task force report, is the virtue of Aristotle, who taught that "virtue is that which enables someone to become what he or she most essentially is."

Virtue is the mark of excellence in function. You are to be and to continue to become what you most essentially are: outstanding human persons. Your excellence in function is not only to be medically competent, but humanely competent. In practicing the art of holistic medicine, please continue to practice with equal diligence the art of being holistically human and humane.

One of the surest ways of practicing your humanity is to practice unconditional love. Love is a many splendored thing, but at its essence is unconditionality. The Greeks called this unconditional love *agape*. This kind of love is closely related to the will. Will without love can become manipulation; love without will can become mere sentimentality.

We rational animals appear to be the only creatures among our animal sisters and brothers (with the possible exception of primates) who are able to love volitionally and who can will to act, not contrary to our instincts, but beyond our instincts for more noble reasons. Our instincts are good and beautiful; and when we transcend their power we do so only for a better reason or for virtue, that is, "to become what we most essentially are": human, humane.

We, for example, may not eat at times, because there may be a better reason not to eat than to eat; we at

times do not make love because there may be a better reason not to make love than to make love. We have choices that our animal sisters and brothers do not seem to have. To love in this way, then, is to be able to act humanly.

Every virtue is an expression of love, and no virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by *agape* love. For example, justice without love is legalism; faith without love is ideology; hope without love is self-centeredness; forgiveness without love is self-abasement; courage without love is recklessness; generosity without love is extravagance; care without love is mere duty; fidelity without love is servitude.

At the heart of being virtuous, then, is to love with our will, which is to act humanly. I shall continue to equate acting humanly with acting lovingly.

The humane physician is the doctor who is and will continue to be

good: good technically and clinically—and good humanly. The maintenance of both competencies is not automatic; they will continue to need attention and will demand prioritization throughout your life. The same demand for discipline that was so essential these past four, five, or six years will be required of you in this next phase of your medical lives.

You are about to enter a period of training that will test your academic, clinical, and human mettle beyond imagination. You will emerge, as you are this morning—good doctors and better doctors—but not without great effort. The same rigor required for excellence in medicine in general and your medical specialty in particular will be required in your quest to be loving human persons.

To love, the essential requirement to be and to remain human, demands great discipline. This kind of humane love, like knowledge, does not come

Introducing John "Jake" Foglio, M.Div.

Our speaker today is the Reverend John P. Foglio, assistant professor emeritus of the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University, who joined the faculty of the Department of Family Practice in 1986 and was an adjunct faculty member in the Center for Ethics and Humanities in the Life Sciences throughout most of his career at MSU-CHM.

Father Foglio received his B.A. degree from Michigan State in 1951 in speech and radio; last night I asked him if it were radio and television, and he assured me it was just radio. In 1957, he received his B.A. degree in philosophy from the Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. He continued to further his education throughout his life, completing a master of divinity degree from St. John's Provincial Seminary in 1980 and a doctorate of ministry

degree from St. Mary's Seminary in the University of Baltimore, Maryland, in 1985.

Father Foglio, a Catholic priest, has had parish assignments in Kalamazoo; Fenton, Michigan; and here in East Lansing. He has been the campus minister at the St. John's Student Parish in East Lansing since 1972.

Dr. Foglio sees medicine and spirituality as intrinsically linked. He believes that an understanding of spirituality is necessary in a fully developed primary care program. He has asserted, often, that if physicians are to understand, nurture, and support the healing of persons, they must understand the vital role of the spiritual in the lives of the persons they treat.

Through a grant from the Fetzer Institute, Dr. Foglio developed a spirituality curriculum that has been incorporated into the required humanities module for our

naturally; we must will to acquire and maintain it, and will to practice it.

The great philosophers of ancient Greece gave us at least three different definitions of love: *eros*, which can be equated with our instincts; *philia*, which some may equate with friendship or reciprocity; and *agape*, which is unconditional, not merely reciprocal; for example, "I will love even when I am not loved." A typical expression of this love would be the good parent, loving him-/herself enough to withstand the young child's taunt: "I hate you, Mom" and be able to respond, "I love you anyway, now drink your milk!"

A CHM graduate and surgery resident in a city hospital related to me that while suturing the lacerations of a person who had just sexually violated another, he was enraged by not only the lack of remorse of the violator but also the macho and cavalier bragging, and the blaming of the victim.

The young resident said, "I felt such hate and revulsion that I was ready to stitch closed orifices that were meant by nature to be open; but I postponed this gratification and my rightful indignation and even treated the patient with respect, because my humanity was at stake."

These are instances of going above and beyond the normal instinct, mood, and strong emotion of retaliation, vengeance, and, worse, silent disdain and hatred, for hatred can literally kill the hater, at least psychically. That is practicing unconditional love. It is not easy, does not come naturally, and requires an ability to love oneself.

Modern psychologists (Eric Fromm, Rollo May, et al.) insist that a person's capacity to love depends on his or her personal maturity, a maturity that includes a fundamental acceptance of oneself with all of one's strengths and limitations. Many physicians, like many of us, should strive to love themselves

as they love others because they would then do a much better job in loving "the other."

Bernie Siegal, the renowned Yale University surgeon, states boldly: "Unreserved self-adoration, stemming not from vanity and narcissism but from self-esteem and a determination to care for our own needs, remains the essence of health." He also states that "an immediate reward of love is a 'live' message to the body" and writes, "I am convinced that unconditional love is the most powerful known stimulant to the immune system."

R. Gula states, "We must practice virtuous activity so that the virtues become habits. We become trustworthy by doing acts of trustworthiness; we become altruistic by doing acts of altruism; we become loving and humane by doing acts of love." The loving doctor must reflect upon, talk about, and diligently practice biopsychosocial medicine while simultaneously reflecting upon,

second-year medical students. He also developed a required course on spirituality for interns in our Department of Family Practice residency program. And on a more informal basis, Dr. Foglio offered biweekly "life issues" seminars to medical students interested in exploring various ethical and spiritual issues that were personally as well as professionally relevant.

During his tenure at the College of Human Medicine, Father Foglio served on numerous committees, and he co-chaired the professional behavioral task force that ultimately developed a system of professional development for students that focuses on the virtuous student physician.

Since his retirement, Father Foglio has continued to facilitate a student professional development group and to advise faculty and administrators, even as early as this morning, on the incorporation of the professional

development activities of the College. We are happy that Father Foglio accepted the invitation of the students to speak today. I am pleased to introduce Father John Foglio, popularly known as Father Jake, to you on this wonderful day.

Christopher C. Colenda, M.D., M.P.H.
Acting Dean

M.D.

talking about, and diligently practicing being humane and loving.

Anthropologist Ashley Montague, when asked how to be more loving, said, "Act as if you are loving." The questioner said, "It changed me and the people I wanted to love more."

So act like the doctor you want to be! To act is not to feign, to be disingenuous, or to discount our emotion, passion, or mood but to will to act humanly, lovingly, in spite of the way one feels, for a humane purpose. To "act as if you are loving" is not to be phony, but to be heroically human.

This many splended thing called love needs to be broken down into its multitudinous component virtues, if we are to act lovingly.

The writing in one of our traditions states that, "Love is patient and kind, never jealous, never boastful or conceited, never rude or selfish, does not take offense, is not resentful, takes no pleasure in other people's sins, but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes."

So act as you will to be! The opposite of love is not hate but apathy, the silent enemy of not acting willfully. Good doctors, will to act as you are—good doctors!

In his good book *The Mysteries Within*, Dr. Newland says, "persons get better just because of the goodness of the doctor."

What precedes clinical touch is the visage, the meeting of the eye of the patient, the windows of our interiority through which our love is transmitted and transcendent power is mediated.

One of your third-year colleagues quoted a patient saying, "Oh yes, I remember you. You are the one with such kind eyes."

Reflection, so necessary for humane action, is as vital for virtue as it is for medical practice and acumen. The

unreflected life, like the unexamined life, is hardly worth living. The practice of virtue presupposes reflection.

Besides personal reflection and such group reflective activity as the physician Balint Group activity, we

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can use narrative or story. Just as story is used effectively in recalling doctor-patient interaction with colleagues in doctor's lounges or at conferences and meetings, storytelling provides the inexperienced doctor with a broader perspective on the dilemmas the practice of medicine presents and furnishes the more experienced physician with a forum to explore alternatives.

Will you new millennium doctors share and record some of the love or humane stories you already have from your last two clinical years and keep a record of times when love was an important interaction in the effective healing of yourself or someone in your life or under your care? Where the humane was part of your medicinal art in the healing process? And tell the whole story, even the recovery from faux pas, mistakes, and dangerous errors.

I would like to share a love story in my life and a love story shared with me by a colleague. My story was the fortunate interaction with a good doctor, one like you, this past January, whose human competence and technical medical competence assured me of the rightness of my ethically solid but emotionally difficult decision to remove a ventilator and permit my dad to die peacefully.

The dual competencies of this good doctor empowered me to love my dad. Thank you, good Doctor!

The love story from my colleague is also a true story: A mother, wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, took him to a Paderewski concert.

When seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the great concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked "NO ADMITTANCE."

When the house lights dimmed, the mother returned to her seat and discovered the boy missing. Suddenly, the curtains parted and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her little son sitting at the keyboard innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit, keep playing." Then, leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child and he added a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience.

The audience was mesmerized.

Will you good doctors humanely whisper in your patients' ears, "don't quit, keep playing," while surrounding them with your bass and running obbligato arms of technical medical excellence, to transform frightening situations into wonderfully creative healing experiences?

Will you good physicians create, reflect on, share, and even record the

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love stories that will chronicle the incidents in your lives where operative unconditional love, the essence of humaneness, made the difference between life and death, sickness and health, joy and sorrow, hope and despair? The incidents that Dr. Bernie Siegel referred to when he boldly stated that "Love is a modern medical miracle."

Graduate doctors, College of Human Medicine Class of 2000, I salute you and congratulate you! You are already the exemplary physicians that this College in its mission statement is committed to develop. We are proud that more than a fifth of you are from groups underrepresented in medicine and that you have a large representation of women and represent a variety of ethnic groups.

You have been called by this College to be virtuous physicians, the virtue that is defined as "excellence in function." Please continue this quest for virtue by pursuing, with equal diligence and vigor, excellence in the practice of medicine and excellence in the practice of love, the essential way to being humane.

Your medical motto is "To do no harm." When we do not love, we often inadvertently harm ourselves, those we love, and those we are committed to serve.

Research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology shows that the heart, the immune system, and hormones all respond in a positive way to the flow of compassion and connectedness we have to ourselves, to others, to nature, and to a larger whole.

Doctors of the new millennium:
Act as you will to be! Good doctors!

Continue to be good, medically exceptional doctors.

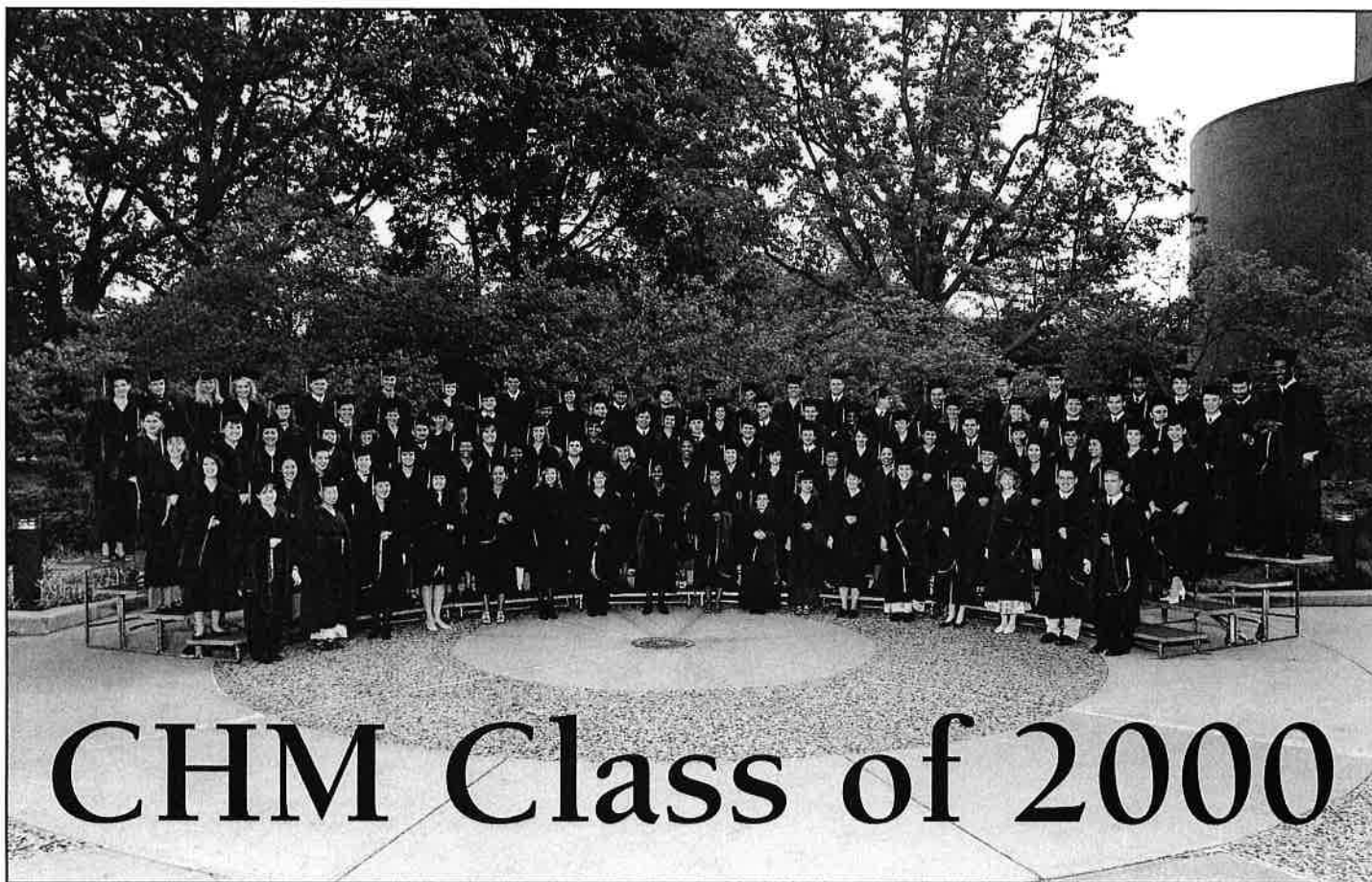
Continue to be good, exceptionally loving doctors.

And you will be and continue to be as you are today—happy doctors.

I feel especially close to you graduate doctors. I know all of you in some way and many of you very well, for you have touched my life.

The Italian equivalent to the Jewish "Mazel Tov (good fortune, congratulations) my brothers and sisters" is "auguri, fratelli e sorelle." AUGURI!!

M.D.



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