

Contemplating Hippocrates

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One of us (WMG) recalls a story from the early days of medical school. The professor prognosticated: "Look to your left and to your right. One of you won't make it through medical school and will drop out in the next 1-2 years." Little did I know then those 35 years after I began medical school, my teenage daughter would also be considering a career in medicine. As she begins her college career and gives thought to her major, we admit to a certain amount of surprise that she has considered a pre-med track. Certainly, having paediatricians as parents likely has had some influence, but we have always encouraged our children to be free thinkers and to live their passion. She has seen us rage against the system, rejoice in a baby's birth, and heard our perspectives on everything from clinical trials to euthanasia and lots in-between. She has been exposed, by association, to the black and white of decision-

making as well as the gray areas, the wonders of medications and the sometimes serious side effects. We have talked about the art of medicine and cherishing the trust that our patients put in us every day. She has seen private practice and academics, part-time and full-time, research and clinical experiences, career track changes, personal health crises and triumphs, and the sacrifices and rewards that this vocation can bring.

Though the threat of not being able to complete medical school based on intellectual performance may not loom as large as it once did, the debt incurred during medical training is astronomical. In 2010, the median debt at graduation was \$150,000 at public institutions, \$180,000 at private, and \$160,000 combined. We have heard of spouses, both completing their medical training, with cumulative household debts nearing a half million dollars (personal communication). As parents, we are left with other uncertainties and questions about our daughter's potential career decision. What, if anything, should we advise her? Should we encourage her to follow her dreams, or be leery of the changing medical scene in the United States? Should we suggest a specialty that may be more difficult to enter, but which may have a better lifestyle or perhaps better

financial rewards in the future? Should we recommend avoiding certain specialties, knowing that the 3-6 years of some residency training programs and potential additional fellowship training can be incredibly gruelling? If we believe that the future of our population depends on becoming wellness-focused and not disease-focused (LAG), does the outlook for post-graduate medical practice in 2025 look promising?

Clearly, these questions are somewhat rhetorical, as our daughter will only be happy with her decision if she is able to make it herself. The field of medicine has certainly come a very long way since we graduated in the 1980s. We can now perform whole genome sequencing for an individual and are actualizing the associations

between specific genetic variants and disease. We are living longer, generally more productive, but not always healthier lives. At this crossroads of hurtling into pharmacogenomics, nutrigenetics, and exome testing, it is worth considering some of the wisdom of Hippocrates. He emphasized environmental factors, diet, and living habits in the pathogenesis of illness. He believed in *vis medicatrix naturae*- the healing power of nature, in the role of the individual in achieving wellness, and the concept of food as medicine. Should our daughter ultimately choose this path, may the world of medicine that she embraces be one that balances genomics with the empowerment of the individual to participate in his or her healing, and may we be able to afford it.