



Phelps Memorial Health Center

PHELPS PHARMACEUTICA



What Took Them So Long?

Bon Mots From Hawkeye

I'm sure we have all forgotten most of what was said at our commencement addresses. What is included below are excerpts from a talk Alan Alda gave at a commencement exercise to the graduating class of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons:

“Ever since they announced that an actor had been invited to speak at this commencement, people have been wondering – why get someone who only plays a doctor when you could get a real one... Maybe the school has done everything it could to show you how to be doctors, and in a moment of desperation they've brought in someone who can show you how to act like one.

I am certainly not a doctor. My knowledge of anatomy resides in the clear understanding that the hipbone is connected to the legbone... But you've asked me here because of a character I've played on television... If you've chosen somehow to associate his character with your graduation from medical school,

then I find that very heartening. If this image of that very human, very caring doctor is attractive to you – if it's ever touched you for a moment as something to reach for in your own life – then I'm here to cheer you on. Do it, go for it. Be Skilled, be learned, be aware of the dignity of your calling... but please don't ever lose sight of your own simple humanity.

You've spent years in a grueling effort to understand the structure and processes of human life. It's required the knowledge of complexities within complexities. You have skills that have been hard to acquire. I only ask one thing of you: Possess your skills, but don't be possessed by them...

With all your study, you can name all the bones in my body. You can read my X-rays like a telegram. But can you read my involuntary muscles? Can you see the fear and uncertainty in my face?

If I tell you where it hurts, can you hear in my voice where I ache? I show you my body, but I bring you my person...

Will you tell me what you're planning on doing to me, and in words I can understand? Will you tell me when you don't know what to do? Can you face your own fear, your own uncertainty? When in doubt, can you call in help?



Will you care more about the case than the person? (“Nurse, have the gastric ulcer come in at three” ... “How's the fractured femur in room 208?”)

Where does money come on your list? Will it be the standard against which you reckon your success?

Where will your family come on your list? How many days and nights, weeks and months, will you separate yourself from them, buried in your work, before you realize that you removed yourself from an important part of your life?





I show you my body, but I bring you my person...



Hawkeye, continued ...

And if you're a male doctor, how will you relate to women? Women as patients, as nurses, as fellow doctors – and later as students. Will you be able to respect your patient's right to know and make decisions about her own body? Will you see nurses as colleagues – or as handmaidens? I hope you men will work to grant the same dignity to your female colleagues that you yourselves enjoy.

And if you're a female doctor, I hope you'll be aware that you didn't get where you are all by yourself. You've had to work hard, but you're sitting where you are right now in part because way back in 1848 in Seneca Falls, women you never knew began insisting you had the right to sit there. Just as they helped a generation they would never see, I urge you to work for the day when your daughters and their daughters will be called not "a woman doctor"

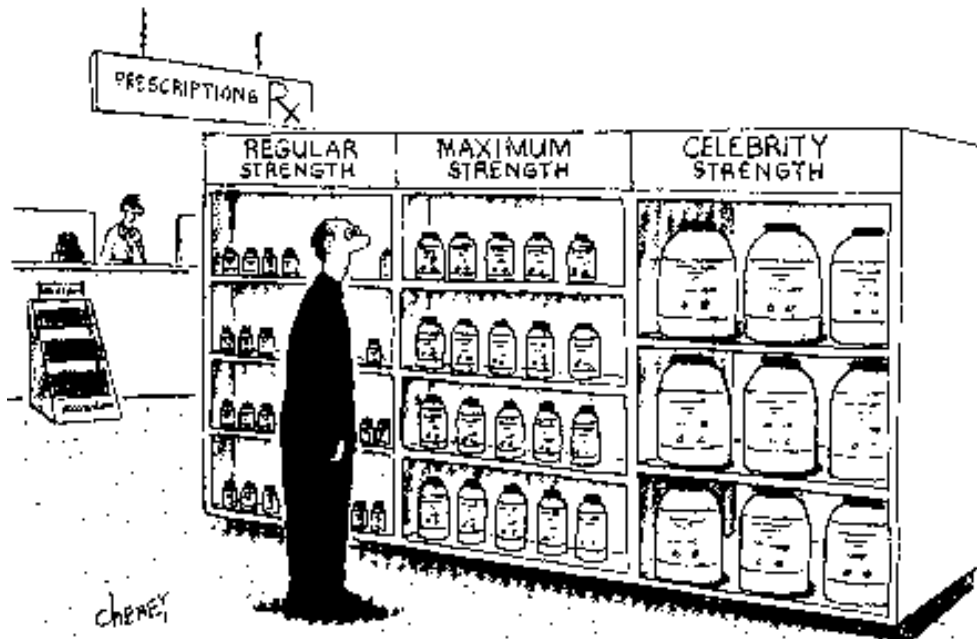
or "my doctor, who's a woman," but simply as "my doctor."

When you think about it, there isn't an area of your work that won't be affected by what you decide to place a high value on and what you decide doesn't count.

Well, that's my prescription. I've given you kind of a big pill to swallow, but I think it'll make you feel better.

I thank you for taking on the enormous responsibility of caring for other people's lives and for having the strength to have made it to this day. I don't know how you've managed to learn it all. But there is one more thing you can learn about the body that only a nondoctor would tell you, and I hope you'll always remember it:

The head bone is connected to the heart bone – don't let them come apart."



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