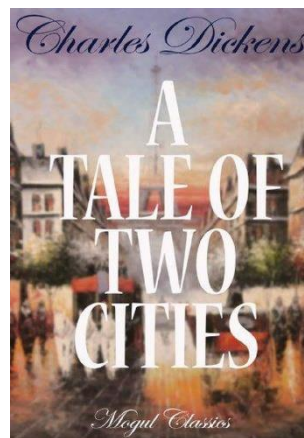


Defending the Ramparts: The Attack on Medical Science

Practicing medicine is hard, really hard. I don't know how to convey this to someone who does not live our world. But practicing medicine can almost be Dickensonian, it can be the best of times and the worst of times, simultaneously.

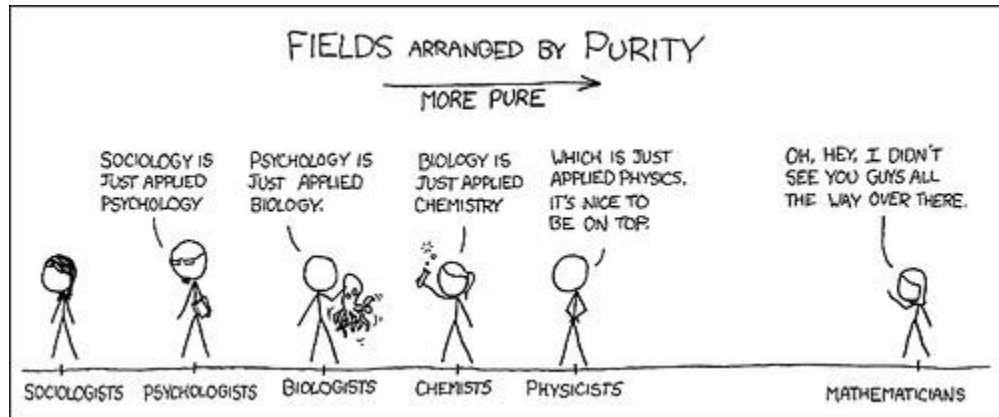


If you really care and take your vocation as a physician seriously, it can be all consuming to the point, unfortunately, where you lose your sense of self. It is a fine line we walk every day between closeness and distance, fear and exaltation, compulsion and exhaustion.



Personally, it has been an amazing journey for me going from a young boy starting to investigate becoming a doctor at age 12 to looking back now over a half a century.

I have always enjoyed the “hard sciences”. There is just something special about having an exact answer to a question. Calculations, done correctly, are thing of beauty. The advancement of knowledge based on these calculations is astonishing. Understanding mathematical equations and how they are interpreted and understood to this day gives me a sense of awe.



At first medicine was harder for me because of its lack of mathematical precision. Why didn't the same thing always work for everybody? Why did one person's lymphoma respond to this treatment and another's did not? But as I grew older and more mature, I came to accept the vagaries of life and the human body and marvel at all there is still to know.

I provided this preamble so that you understand my mind set as I discuss a feature of education that seems to be destroying our colleges and universities, and now our medical schools. Social justice has entered medical school and it is truly as if the barbarians are at the gate. Don't misunderstand me, I have no problem with social justice but its entry into the education system and particularly the medical education system will be a day that we will rue for decades to come.



A few days ago I read an article in the Wall Street Journal and was horrified to find how pervasive the social justice creep into education is becoming. I ask you to read Dr. Stanley Goldfarb's article here: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/take-two-aspirin-and-call-me-by-my-pronouns-11568325291>.

My initial reaction was not even a political one or an ethical one. It was a wave of terror pulling out my old feelings when, as a medical student I felt that there was simply too much to learn, too much to know to ever allow me to take care of anybody.

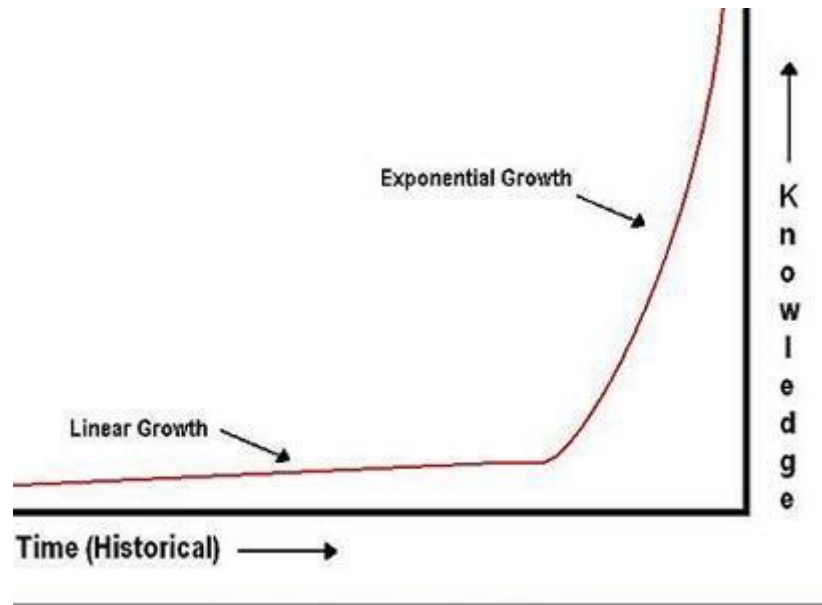


Figure 1 - The Knowledge Doubling Curve

The generation before me who started their education in the 1950's had it much easier than I did. The doubling time of medical knowledge was about 50 years. The things they learned in school pretty much held true to form as they started their practice. In the late 70's and 80's when I studied and trained, the doubling time was 7 years. This meant that from the time I started medical school to the time I finished my residency, knowledge had already doubled. To make matters worse, I still had three years of cardiology fellowship to conquer. Students entering medical school in 2010 had a doubling time of 3.5 years. If any of those medical students went on to fellowship, they would have to acquire knowledge through three doublings. What is the projection for 2020 students? Oh about 0.2 years. Talk about stress! Talk about an inordinate amount of information. Yet we are trying to train more generalists who need to know it all (but that's another story).

On top of this vast array of medical knowledge, we are now going to expect physicians to handle their patients' unemployment, housing instability, food

access, systemic racism and systemic sexism issues. We are going to ask physicians to factor in their own points of view and that of their patients on immigration reform, climate change and violence.

After wiping off the cold sweat of “medical school past”, I tried to further understand the ramifications of trying to “deharden” the hard sciences. This has never been successful as you might remember from your experience with mathematics. First there was math, then there was new math, then there was new new math. And now there is common core math. Check out this illustration of common core math:

**TODAY'S THIRD GRADE
COMMON CORE MATH PROBLEM:**

**Apple Hill is 568 feet high. Banana Hill is 293 feet high.
How many feet higher is Apple Hill than Banana Hill?**

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<p>$568 - 293 = ?$ Start with 568. Subtract the 2 hundreds in 293. $568 - 200 = 368$</p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px;">So far, 200 has been subtracted.</p>	<p>Now, start with 368. Subtract the 9 tens in 293. There are not enough tens. So, subtract the 6 tens that are there. $368 - 60 = 308$ Then, subtract the tens that are left. 9 tens - 6 tens = 3 tens $308 - 30 = 278$</p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px;">So far, $200 + 60 + 30 = 290$ has been subtracted.</p>	<p>Start with 278. Subtract the 3 ones in 293. $278 - 3 = 275$ In all $200 + 60 + 30 + 3 = 293$ has been subtracted.</p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px;">Apple Hill is 275 feet higher than Banana Hill.</p>

What was wrong with the old way?

$$\begin{array}{r} 568 \\ -293 \\ \hline 275 \end{array}$$

Unfortunately, science if done correctly is still science. You must apply the same facts whether you are white or black, rich or poor, gay or straight. You see, science really does not care. No matter your immigration, status $2+2=4$. Sodium and Chloride combine to form Sodium Chloride. Kinetic Energy $K=p^2/2m$.

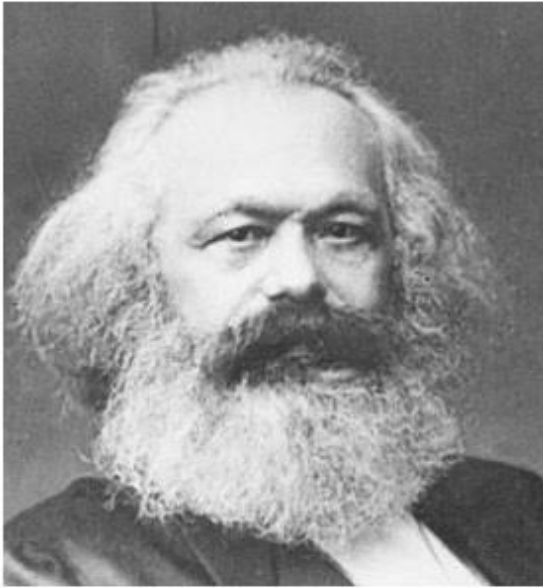
As you know, medicine is not quite so “hard” as physics. We are trained as physicians to inquire as to some social aspects of our patients’ lives in a very non-judgmental way. Are you a smoker? Yes, you know you are really increasing your risk of cancer and heart disease? No one is reporting patients who smoke to the smoking police.

Throughout history, social standings have never been fair. It has never been the place of the physician to smooth out the curves and treat patients differently based on their perceived victimhood. In fact, we pride ourselves on treating everyone as a human being and doing the best we possibly can for each and every individual.



When the Hippocratic oath is administered, we do not say that we will take special care if the patient is bisexual, he may have been discriminated against. We did not hold up for special treatment Guatemalan migrants, nor did we take an oath to be especially mindful of aboriginals. The social justice warriors fail to realize in their zeal to bring their personal thoughts to the forefront, that medicine has always been about making sure you do the best you can for whoever seeks your services.

After reading about social justice and medical school, I became very angry. I deal with people everyday and, through the years, I have truly come to appreciate each and everyone of my patients. We have a unique relationship as only people who share things on a certain level can attain. I know their families and their foibles; I know their successes and their secrets. Who are these social justice warriors who on a whole have never practiced a day of medicine to tell me and my patients that our doctor patient relationship is flawed because of my lack of social justice training? Who are they to dictate the curriculum to those who follow in my footsteps? The social justice stand-ins care if my patient is Marxist or Keynesianism, I do not.



Karl Heinrich Marx
(1818-1883)



John Maynard Keynes
(1883-1946)

The social justice warriors seem to care if you support Republicans or Democrats, I do not. I am sorry if you think my outmoded thought of believing in two sexes disturbs you, I will still do my best for you and no amount of social justice “training” will change my mind. A social justice warrior will probably care if I believe in the patriarchy, white privilege or single payor health care. Not me, I want to see if I can help you.

Finally, I was upset because I know that medical schools are grade conscious. If political thought and social justice is a part of the curriculum those individuals with the “proper thought” will be rewarded, not those with the best mastery of the reams of medical knowledge. I want the most diligent physician caring for me, not the most politically correct.

As our world gets more and more impregnated with ideology, hard fact becomes diluted. Medical decisions which are complex enough, become overloaded to the point of inaction.

These thoughts are not because I am against anyone or anything. Instead I am for my patient, his needs and his illnesses. I don't need a social justice warrior at the bedside. I have something more lasting. A Hippocratic oath.

Hippocratic Oath- Modern Version

I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures [that] are required, avoiding those twin traps of overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism.

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.

I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.