

**Guest Editorial**

*"Many patients regain health simply through satisfaction with an understanding doctor"*

—Hippocrates

Boston, Massachusetts is home to many of America's finest and most elite universities, medical schools, and teaching hospitals. Medical students from throughout the world come to Boston for undergraduate and graduate training in the great academic medical centers and teaching hospitals for which this city is justifiably famous. Recently, however, this sterling reputation has been seriously tarnished by two tragic events that have cast doubt on the quality of clinical care at some of these institutions and rocked the medical community to its very core.

The first involved a local hero, Reggie Lewis, who was the captain of the Boston Celtics basketball team and one of the premier players in the National Basketball Association. Because of the amount of running involved in the sport, basketball players are among the best-conditioned athletes, yet Reggie Lewis inexplicably collapsed during a game and had to be taken off the playing court. At a local academic medical center, a "dream team" of prominent cardiologists was assembled to examine the data and to make recommendations. After ordering voluminous tests, they advised Mr Lewis not to play basketball again because of the seriousness of his cardiac condition. Confused and frustrated, he left the first hospital and went across the street to the Brigham and Woman's Hospital, where an equally eminent cardiologist gave him the opposite advice and told him his problem was not that serious. Reggie Lewis died a few weeks later while practicing basketball.

The second event occurred at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, one of the leading cancer research and treatment centers in the world. Ms Betsy Lehman, once medical editor for the *Boston Globe* newspaper, died after being given massive overdoses of a highly toxic drug that was being used to treat her breast cancer. She was given these overdoses on 4 consecutive days, and, despite appalling side effects, the error was not noticed. In fact, it was only discovered several months later by a clerk doing a routine check in the hospital's pharmacy. Other patients have since been discovered to have received similar overdoses.

These two well-known and savvy patients received the highest of "high-tech" medicine from the "best" doctors at the most respected academic medical centers in the world, yet each suffered a disastrous result. How could this possibly happen? Many conclusions can be drawn from these case reports, and one can view these events as a metaphor for all that is wrong with our health care system. But the

common thread that runs through both cases is not what these two patients received, but what they lacked: a personal doctor. Reggie Lewis did not need a dream team of super-specialists, each with his own agenda. He did need a caring, compassionate doctor whom he trusted and who would be his advocate. Betsy Lehman had the best oncologists in the world, people on the leading edge of cancer research. What she did not have was a doctor who would sit by her bed, review her status daily, offer words of encouragement, and make sure she was responding appropriately to treatment. Few patients realize that the most respected and valued people at teaching hospitals are not those who are involved in the clinical patient care relegated to residents, graduate fellows, and nurses. The real power and prestige is given to researchers who attract grants, attend symposia, and write learned articles. We have become so enthralled with the enormously interesting and very seductive science of medicine that we are in danger of losing our humanity.

In the middle of the last century, the great French surgeon Armand Trousseau lectured to his students at the Hotel Dieu in Paris, saying, "Medicine consists of science and art in a certain relationship to each other. . . . Science can be learned by anyone, even the mediocre. Art, however, is a gift from heaven. So you cannot count yourself among the great doctors simply by acquiring knowledge. The scientist continually and receptively gathers a vast amount of material, while the artist creates new roads of thought. Knowledge suffocates the scientist, whereas it gives the artist fresh inspiration. Therefore, gentlemen, learn as much as you can . . . but your learning must be the basis for your art, not an end in itself. A little less science and a little more art, Messieurs.

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