GREETINGS, ETC.

I ALWAYS HAVE FELT AT HOME AMONG SURGEONS.

I AM A SURGEON, AND I HOPE I HAVE BEEN AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE FOR SURGEONS.

WHEN I WAS IN THE GOVERNMENT YOU AND I WENT ABOUT OUR WORK IN OUR OWN WAYS, AND NOW IT IS GOOD TO BE BACK.

THERE'S A BASIC HONESTY ABOUT SURGERY.

SURGEONS UNDERSTAND THAT SOMETIMES SOME THINGS NEED TO BE SAID, EVEN IF THEY AREN'T ALWAYS PLEASANT TO HEAR.

YOU ARE THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS.

THAT'S GOOD.

WE NEED SOME THINGS --AND PEOPLE-- MOVED AND SHAKEN.

THROUGHOUT MY LIFE AS A SURGEON I HAD NEVER CONTEMPLATED GOVERNMENT SERVICE. FOR ME, PROBABLY LIKE MOST OF YOU, THE VERY THOUGHT WAS ANATHEMA. NEVERTHELESS I PROVED RECEPTIVE TO THE FIRST SMALL BEGINNING BECAUSE IN AUGUST 1980 SOMEONE TELEPHONED ME AND ASKED CRYPTICALLY,

"DON'T YOU THINK THE SURGEON GENERAL SHOULD BE A SURGEON." IT GOT ME THINKING POSITIVELY.

EVEN THOUGH IT HAS NOW BEEN SEVERAL MONTHS SINCE I HUNG UP THE UNIFORM OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, I STILL SEEM TO BE A RECOGNIZABLE FELLOW.

WALKING ALONG THE STREET HERE IN SAN FRANCISCO, IN THE NEW YORK SUBWAY, IN AIRPORT WAITING ROOMS, PEOPLE COME UP TO ME:

"HI, DOC!", OR "KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!" OR,

"I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL. KEEP AFTER THOSE TOBACCO COMPANIES."

IF MY PLANE IS DELAYED, I OFTEN END UP HOLDING OFFICE HOURS IN THE AIRPORT WAITING AREA.

"YOU ARE THE ONE WHO FINALLY MADE ME STOP SMOKING!"

OR EVEN, "SAY, I HATE TO BOTHER YOU, BUT I'VE GOT THIS PAIN IN MY ELBOW..."

ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS I'VE BEEN RECOGNIZED BY A STRANGER, AND THEN BOTH PLEASED AND SADDENED BY SOMEONE SAYING TO ME,

"I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR MAKING ME PROUD, ONCE AGAIN, TO BE A DOCTOR."

I'M PLEASED, OF COURSE, BECAUSE I'VE GIVEN MY LIFE TO THIS PROFESSION, AND IT HAS BEEN GOOD TO ME.

BUT I'M SADDENED TO HEAR FROM SO MANY OF MY COLLEAGUES WHO HAVE LOST THE PRIDE, THE JOY OF BEING A PHYSICIAN.

MORE THAN SADDENED, I'M ANGRY.

I'VE JUST FINISHED FILMING 5 PRIMETIME SPECIALS ON HEALTH TO BE AIRED LATER THIS YEAR ON N.B.C. I'VE SPENT 5 MONTHS GOING BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THIS COUNTRY, FILMING IN 20 CITIES, A FEW TOWNS AND HAMLETS, AND IN REMOTE CORNERS OF RURAL AMERICA.

THIS EXPERIENCE WITH SO MANY FACETS OF AMERICAN MEDICINE HAS MADE ME ANGRY.

I AM ANGRY ABOVE ALL BECAUSE OF THE DETERIORATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN DOCTOR, FOR I BELIEVE THAT THE DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP LIES AT THE HEART OF ALL MEDICINE.

MUCH OF IT IS OUR FAULT.

WHY HAVE WE PERSISTED NOT IN ROOT OUT THE ~~REFUSE IN~~ ING SE WITO DEGRADE

OUR PROFESSION?

WE TOLERATE PEOPLE WHO ARE INCOMPETENT, WHO ARE GREEDY, WHO ARE ABUSIVE OF PATIENTS, WHO ARE ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSERS.

THESE PEOPLE SHOULD BE REMOVED, AND WHERE POSSIBLE, REHABILITATED. ONLY THEN SHOULD THEY BE RESTORED

BUS DRIVERS AND AIRLINE PILOTS DO BETTER IN POLICING THEIR OWN. A MEDICAL SCHOOL DEGREE SHOULD NOT PROVIDE MORAL IMMUNITY.

MEDICINE HAS SUFFERED FROM AN INABILITY TO SELF-REGULATE ITS MEMBERS, AND THIS FAILING HAS PLAYED HAVOC WITH THE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES OF PROFESSIONAL INSURANCE AND LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION...IN OTHER WORDS, THE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES OF PUBLIC TRUST.

AS A RESULT, THE CONGRESS HAD TO STEP IN AND ENACT LEGISLATION SETTING UP A NATIONAL PRACTITIONER DATA BANK ON PHYSICIANS SO THAT WE COULD FIND THE BAD APPLES --IN THE SAME WAY WE FIND DRUNK DRIVERS AND BANK ROBBERS AND ASSORTED OTHER FUGITIVES FROM JUSTICE.

IT'S AN IGNOMINIOUS DEVELOPMENT, TO SAY THE LEAST. BUT THERE IT IS. THERE ARE SOME UNFAIR PREJUDICIAL ASPECTS TO THE PRESENT SETUP. THEY CAN BE CORRECTED, — BUT WILL THEY? WILL THE OVERALL PRACTICE OF MEDICINE BE IMPROVED? WILL REFERRING PHYSICIANS AND PATIENTS BE BETTER ABLE TO CHOSE AMONG MANY?

AND IT'S A TRAGEDY BECAUSE IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED.

IT'S A TRAGEDY BECAUSE DAY IN AND DAY OUT MOST AMERICANS RECEIVE GOOD MEDICAL CARE - AS GOOD AS ANY PLACE IN THE WORLD - FROM HONEST, COMPETENT PHYSICIANS.

UNFORTUNATELY GOOD NEWS IS NOT HEADLINE NEWS - -THE OCCASIONAL BAD APPLE IS, ...AND DOES GRAB THE HEADLINES. SAD TO CONTEMPLATE, BUT THE MEDICAL PROFESSION HAS FOOLISHLY SQUANDERED ITS PUBLIC TRUST AND POSITION OF LEADERSHIP.

NOW, PHARMACISTS HAVE REPLACED DOCTORS AS THE MOST TRUSTED PROFESSION IN AMERICA.

THE PUBLIC IS VERY CRITICAL OF DOCTORS.

AND DOCTORS NO LONGER LIKE THEIR PATIENTS.

DOCTORS LET THEMSELVES BE CALLED PROVIDERS, AND PATIENTS BECAME CONSUMERS.

WE NEED TO GET AWAY FROM THE CONSUMER-PROVIDER MENTALITY.

WE NEED TO RESTORE THE DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP.

EACH OF US.

RECENTLY, ONE OF MY FRIENDS, QUITE ACCUSTOMED TO SPENDING HIS TIME WITH OTHER DOCTORS, FOUND HIMSELF WITH A GROUP OF LAWYERS INSTEAD ---YES, THE TWO CAN GET TOGETHER!

THE ATTORNEYS WERE CONGRATULATING THEMSELVES ON WHAT THEY WERE ABLE TO DO FOR THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS. IT HAD BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE MY FRIEND HAD HEARD DOCTORS SPEAK IN THAT VEIN.

IF LAWYERS CAN FEEL GOOD ABOUT WRITING A WILL,

CAN'T WE FEEL PROUD ABOUT POSTPONING ITS USE?

WE SHOULD BE PROUD ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

LIFE EXPECTANCY IN THIS COUNTRY HAS GONE FROM 47 YEARS IN 1900 TO 75 BY 1990.

NOW DOCTORS DO MORE AND GET THANKED LESS.

INSTEAD OF CELEBRATING, DOCTORS AND PATIENTS ARE SQUARING OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER.

DOCTOR-BASHING HAS BECOME A POPULAR SPORT.

THERE IS EXASPERATION ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STETHOSCOPE.

AMERICAN MEDICINE IS AT A CROSSROADS.

I HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT THE STAKES ARE.

TEN YEARS FROM NOW YOU COULD BE DOING ONE OF SEVERAL THINGS:

(AND WHEN I SAY <u>YOU</u>, I AM ADDRESSING THE PHYSICIANS OF AMERICA. YOU ARE THE LEADERSHIP AMONG SURGEONS)

YOU COULD BE WORKING WITH THE PUBLIC TO FREE US ALL FROM A HASTILY IMPOSED NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE,

OR,

YOU COULD HAVE SHIFTED FROM PATIENT-ADVOCATE TO AGENT FOR ALL INSURANCE COMPANIES.

OR,

YOU COULD HAVE LOST YOUR PROFESSIONAL STATUS AND COME TO BE REGARDED AS A MEMBER OF ANY ONE OF A NUMBER OF JOURNEYMEN GUILDS.

OR,

YOU COULD BE PART OF THE BEST SYSTEM OF MEDICAL CARE IN THE WORLD, DELIVERING HEALTHCARE TO THE GREAT SATISFACTION OF YOUR PATIENTS AND YOURSELF.

AND YOU COULD BE PART OF A SYSTEM THAT DELIVERS REASONABLE HEALTHCARE TO EVERY AMERICAN AT REASONABLE COST, --URGING [redacted] THEM TO PREVENT DISEASE AS WELL AS TO TREAT IT.

PLEASE FIND SOME WAY TO DISABUSE THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS OF THE NOTION THAT YOUR INCOME IS YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY, AND THAT YOU HAVE CEASED TO BE THE PROFESSIONALS THAT YOUR FATHERS AND GRANDFATHERS IN MEDICINE WERE.

IF DOCTORS PAY ATTENTION TO HIGH QUALITY AND HIGH EFFICIENCY IN THEIR MEDICAL PRACTICE, IN MOST INSTANCES THE BOTTOM LINE WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF.

I KNOW ORGANIZED MEDICINE DOES NOT CONSIDER ITSELF A UNION.

BUT WE DO COMBINE FOR COMMON PURPOSES.

AND WE CAN LEARN FROM WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO UNIONS.

FOR FAR TOO LONG THEIR ONLY CONCERNS WERE INCOME, WORKING CONDITIONS, AND BENEFITS.

MEANWHILE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY WERE IGNORED.

NOW, BELATEDLY, THEY ARE SCRAMBLING TO ADDRESS QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY.

THE AMERICAN AUTO INDUSTRY AFFORDS A GOOD EXAMPLE.

I IMAGINE THAT MANY DOCTORS WHO USED TO DRIVE BUICKS AND CADILLACS NOW SIT BEHIND THE WHEELSOF CAMRYS AND MAXIMAS.