

# Preface

This book is based on a course on “The Art of Medicine” which I had given every year at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia for over 20 years to medical students, pediatric trainees, and the staff. I have presented portions of this course at other medical centers in U.S.A, India and Italy. The topics included are skills required of a clinician — listening skills, observational skills, diagnostic skills, problem solving skills, communications skills, and just plain helping skills. Several students and physicians who have attended the course suggested that I put the material together as a book. So here it is.

I wrote this book primarily for medical students and trainees (residents, house officers) in various medical subjects — generalists and specialists. Most of the examples are from pediatrics since that is my area of experience. However, the contents and references should be useful to trainees in other medical disciplines. Other health professionals may also find this book useful.

The purpose of the book is to share practical ideas on how to observe, how to listen, how to help and how to communicate. These skills are important in many other fields and professionals in these disciplines have developed tools to improve these skills. Physicians should feel free and comfortable to borrow these ideas from other professions. Therefore, you will find references from disciplines as varied as Art History and Semantics. Initially I wanted to include classic articles such as *Social Contract* by Talcott Parsons, *Illness Behavior* by David Mechanic and *Helping Relationship* by Carl Rogers

as part of the book. Since copyright issues made it difficult to accomplish this goal, I have listed these articles and books as references or as part of the “Reading List” at the end of each chapter.

Most educational programs do not address the topics covered in this book in a formal and systematic manner. That was the reason why I organized this course many years ago. Now these topics have become more and more relevant because of the emphasis on communication and human relation skills in the training and evaluation of physicians for both board certification and recertification. Therefore, this book can be used as a Primer for the newly emerging competency based medical education courses for medical students and physician trainees. I have added specific exercises on clinical skills in the final chapter on *How to Organize a Course on Clinical Competency Skills* to help you get started.

The numbers of people I am indebted to are in the hundreds, starting with the many children who helped me grow as a pediatrician and the many pediatric trainees at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and at the A. I. duPont Hospital for Children who helped me grow to be a teacher. My brother, Professor N. H. Athreya and Doctor Lewis Coriell have been my mentors and role models. My interest in human relation skills and communication came from my brother. He is also responsible for most of the ideas in Chapter 10 on learning and teaching. Doctor Coriell gave the foundations for my scientific attitudes to medicine.

Doctor Henry Cecil gave me an opportunity to practice what I had learnt in books and gave me practical pointers. The course I developed and this book are the results of application of clinical skills under Doctor Cecil’s watch and support.

Many of the ideas presented in this book were polished during the discussions I have had with Ramaa, my wife, also a physician. She knew of my love for teaching and writing. Without her understanding and support, I could not have become a better teacher. My children Bama, Hari, and Sheela knew my strengths and weaknesses, indulged me a lot and taught me about “knowing myself” first.

I received considerable support and invaluable editorial suggestions from two seasoned academicians in medicine — Doctor Abraham

Verghese of the Stanford University School of Medicine and Doctor Peter Dent at McMaster University, Canada. I acknowledge their help with thanks. I also acknowledge the editorial help I received from Mr. Hiran Ratnayake, Ms. Michelle Stofa and Ms. Kim Eissman with thanks. Mr. Gerald Murray drew Figs. 4.2 and 4.3.

Angela and Richard Hoy of Booklocker.com helped me publish this book in e-format and publish-on-demand schedule. They gave me invaluable suggestions to popularize the book. Without their ideas and help, this book would not have seen the light of the day. I thank them for their support and encouragement.

Following the publication of the e-edition, I received feedbacks from several colleagues. Many ideas from these feedbacks have been incorporated in this book. I wish to give special thanks to two in particular: Doctor James Johnson of Chappaqua, NY and Doctor Bud Weiderman of Washington, DC.

I greatly appreciate the interest and enthusiasm of Ms. Ang Ching Ting and Ms. Shelley Chow of World Scientific Publishing/Imperial College Press. They kept me on schedule with gentle reminders. Their responses were always timely, their support unflinching and their approach always professional.

My sincere thanks to all of these significant people and many more I have not mentioned individually.

Although it is obvious that physicians may be males or females just as patients may be males or females, I have used the word “he” exclusively for the sake of simplicity. Please read he/she wherever you see the word “he”. Thank you.

Finally, I have a request for the reader. Please share your ideas and experiences with me, if you wish. I may like to include some of them, with your permission, in future revisions.

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