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The Well-Rounded Clinician

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Being a good clinician is a lifelong daily task. Good clinicians, regardless of the era, base their practice on clinical experience, scientific knowledge and ever-evolving medical technology. Incorporating the technology of the day into clinical practice makes diagnosis and patient care more efficient.

While medical technology can improve the efficiency of patient care as well as generate helpful data, the clinician should not lose contact with the patient nor treat only the laboratory findings. As Francis W. Peabody, MD, stated in one of a series of lectures to the students of Harvard Medical School, "... the secret of the care of the patient is caring for the patient."¹ Thus the clinician, while using technology, still needs to be able to apply common sense, courage and compassion in dealing with all the human difficulties that escape technology.

Medical literature typically summarizes the diagnosis, clinical manifestations or prognosis of patients with an individual disease. The clinician, however, cares for the individual patient, who often differs in important ways from patients reported in the literature. Thus, part of the art of medicine is the application of this information to the individual patient.

Clinicians perpetually strive to achieve perfection while practicing medicine. Unfortunately, clinicians are not infallible, and at times may make mistakes that could negatively impact a patient's health. The good clinician is able to learn from these mistakes, as well as avoid the repetition of the same mistakes.²

Finally, a good clinician is well rounded, being able to maintain a balance between clinical experience, scientific knowledge and medical technology, and to utilize sound ethical judgment when making clinical decisions (Figure 1).³

References

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2. Wu AW, Folkman S, McPhee SJ, Lo B: Do house staff officers learn from their mistakes? JAMA 1991; 265: 2089-2094.
3. Wooley CF, Boudoulas H: Clinician. Hell J Cardiol 1993; 34: 241-243.

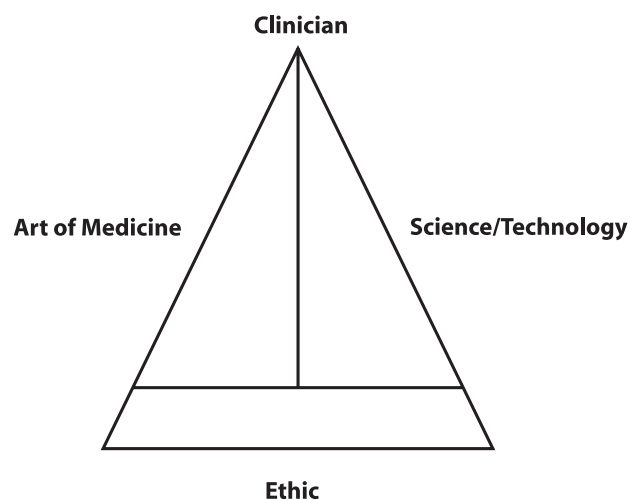


Figure 1. The ethic and choice of ethic forms the bedrock and basis for balance and integration between the art of medicine and the science and technology which underlie the clinician's function.