Empathy, Prayer, and Patient Care

Dr. David Carsten

WSU, Pullman 1980 BS Biochemistry
University of Washington 1984, DDS
Assistant Clinical Professor, OHSU 1995-2008
Assistant Clinical Professor, USC 2007-2012
MSGD 2012
Award of Distinction, ADI, 2005
Dentist Anesthesiologist, Lutheran Medical Center 2010
Brooklyn, New York
Mentor of the COORS study group
Graduation Speaker 2015, Centralia College Outstanding Alumni Award
Commissioner with DQAC Washington State 2016 to present
ASA Steering Committee for DL OSCE 2017 to present

“In my deepest, darkest moments, what really got me through was a prayer. Sometimes my prayer was ‘Help me.’ Sometimes a prayer was ‘Thank you.’ What I’ve discovered is that intimate connection and communication with my creator will always get me through because I know my support, my help, is just a prayer away.”

Iyanla Vanzant

She had a talk show, and book contracts but quickly, she lost her husband, daughter, and everything she owned. She almost committed suicide.

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In the Christian tradition, prayer can take many different forms, including:

• conversational prayer, in which a person engages in an informal conversation with God about day-to-day matters, seeking guidance and counsel, or expressing gratitude for life and wellbeing:
  “Hail Mary, full of grace…”
• meditative prayer, in which a person contemplates spiritual themes and the relationship of the divine to mankind:
  “Our Father, who art in Heaven…”
• ritual prayer, which takes the form of reciting or reading well known prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer:
• intercessory prayer, characterised by petitions on behalf of others for their health and wellbeing:
Prayer as medicine: how much have we learned?

Relaxation Response
Prayer as Placebo
Positive Emotions
Relational

“The problem with studying religion scientifically is that you do violence to the phenomenon by reducing it to basic elements that can be quantified, and that makes for bad science and bad religion,” said Dr. Richard Sloan, a professor of behavioral medicine at Columbia and author of the book, "Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine."

Herbert Benson, MD, Harvard has studied prayer for the last 30 years
Buddhist meditation in particular
All forms of prayer can evoke a relaxation response
quiets stress
quiets the body
promotes healing
by decreasing sympathetic tone (Valsalva maneuver, incentive spirometer)
Most prayer involves repetition
-- focus on sounds and words
-- and therein lies the entry to the process

MRI brain scans
When combined with University of Pennsylvania studies—
A picture of complex brain activity during prayer:
As an individual goes deeper and deeper into concentration
1. Intense activity begins taking place in the brain's parietal lobe circuits -- those that control a person's orientation in space and establish distinctions between self and the self in the world.
Benson describes a "quietude" that then envelops the entire brain.

2. At the same time, frontal and temporal lobe circuits (which track time and create self-awareness) become disengaged.

3. The mind-body connection dissolves.

4. The limbic system "emotional tagging system" becomes activated.
   also regulates relaxation 
   ultimately controlling the autonomic nervous system 
   heart rate 
   blood pressure 
   metabolism 
   and more

5. The result:
   your focus can become emotionally significant 
   Many feel a sense of awe and quiet. 
   The body becomes more relaxed and 
   physiological activity becomes more evenly regulated.

When this happens...

Are we communicating with a higher being -- are we "hard-wired" at the factory to do just that?

purely subjective

☆ If you're religious, it is God-given.

☆ If you're not religious, it comes from the brain, an evolutionary advantage.
The Seven Habits of Successful Health Care Providers

- Reflective, Meditative
- Self
- Hope
- Compassion
- Curiosity
- Communication
- Discretion

Confirmation Bias

Toast causes cancer.

Acrylamide has always been present in some foods, but this wasn’t known until Swedish scientists first found it in certain foods in 2002.
— American Cancer Society (website)

Christopher Ramsden of NIH
40-year-old study

vegetable fats instead of animal fats...good for the heart?
The study, the largest gold-standard experiment testing that idea, found the opposite was true

12 April 2017 in BMJ report of this late 1970's study

failure to publish the results of clinical trials can undermine truth and harm the public

9,423 study participants, ages 20 to 97
generated a single paper that did not use the data.
Empathy is part of politics, science, and life. It can be used for good or evil.

Why?

A lack of empathy is a very common patient complaint. Why is empathy so lacking in much of health care?

An Introductory Philosophy of Medicine: Humanizing Modern Medicine
By James A. Marcum

Osler, in 1943, distinguished between sympathy, which hinders a physician's effectiveness, and empathy, which enhances that effectiveness. “Detached yet interested.”

May 24, 1958
SYMPATHY AND EMPATHY
Charles D. Aring, M.D.

The act or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another is known as sympathy. Empathy, on the other hand, not only is an identification of sorts but also connotes an awareness of one's separateness from the observed. One of the most difficult tasks put upon man is reflective commitment to another's problem while maintaining his own identity. The ways in which one person may react to another are infinite. A subtle and significant feature of a happy medical practice is to remain unencumbered by the patient's problem.
that is reflective commitment to another’s problem while maintaining his own identity. The ways in which one person may react to another are infinite. A subtle and significant feature of a happy medical practice is to remain unencumbered by the patient’s problem.

Barriers
- No to Vulnerability
- Prize Perfectionism
- Tied to Outcomes
- Projections Personal Outcomes

JAMA. 2005 Mar 2;293(9):1100-6.
Clinical empathy as emotional labor in the patient-physician relationship.
Larson EB, Yao X.

"physicians are more effective healers—and enjoy more professional satisfaction—when they engage in the process of empathy."

The New York Times
Pre-Med’s New Priorities: Heart and Soul and Social Science

50% of the new MCAT for admissions beginning in 2015 has a new focus...to choose doctors that are inherently empathetic.
Will it choose the scientist/humanist/spiritual doctor they want? Someone who will listen and understand people?"
How do we learn empathy?

- Empathy is in our own wiring. A talent and a skill, about 96% have some empathic ability.
- By example.
- By performing with others in front of a crowd.
- By reading about the inner life of people.
- By movies.

Mirror Neurons

- premotor cortex
- supplementary motor area
- primary somatosensory cortex
- inferior parietal cortex
- learning language and physical actions
- theory of mind skills
- **empathy**

Mirroring
Sympathy ↔ Empathy

Emotional response to the suffering of another.  
Understanding the feelings, thoughts, or suffering of another.


Compassion

Deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it.

Sympathy ↔ Empathy

ME

YOU

Placebo Effects in Guidelines, Practice, and Patient Choice:
Beginning a Conversation about an Under-recognized Therapeutic Tool
Asthma
no difference between the drug and placebo

IBS
significant improvement
better than the "real" drug

The Jefferson Scale of Empathy
measures empathy in physicians and other health professionals (HP/Physician version), medical students (S-version), and health professional students (HPStudent version).

Training, in the last 100 years, has served to degrade empathy.

Clinical Inattention

Doctors have less Burnout and Better Patient Care With Mindfulness Training
10-30-2013
Wake Forest Medical Center
Training of 3rd year medical students to decrease long term stress and burnout while in practice.

PAY ATTENTION
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<td>Repeat Over and Over the attitude or behavior or value you desire</td>
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Mindfulness Takes Practice  
Reinforce Positives |
| 39   | Pay Mindfulness Attention |
| 40   | Pay Mindfulness Attention |
Empathy

Sympathy

Compassion

Loving Kindness
Each profession has its own time pressures:
- Challenges to you being empathetic
- How can they be overcome?
- Impact of your empathetic behaviour?

Psychology Today June 2014
Clay Routledge Ph.D.

Five scientifically-supported benefits of prayer:
1. Prayer improves self-control
2. Prayer makes you nicer
3. Prayer makes you more forgiving
4. Prayer increases trust people pray together with a close friend increased feelings of unity and trust. Social prayer
5. Prayer offsets the negative health effects of stress — decreases sympathetic tone
— thinking about the welfare of others may be a crucial component of receiving personal benefits from prayer

“We’re not looking at prayer as an alternative to angioplasty,” he adds. “We’re very high-tech people here. We’re looking at whether in all of the energy and interest we have put into systematic investigation of high-tech medicine, if we have actually missed the boat. Have we ignored the rest of the human being — the need for something more — that could make all the high-tech stuff work better?”

Studies on intercessory prayer
2006 meta analysis on 14 studies concluded that there is "no discernible effect"
This study cost $2.4 million, and most of the money came from the John Templeton Foundation, which supports research into spirituality.

The government has spent more than $2.3 million on prayer research since 2000. (2013)

Dean Marek, a chaplain at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and a coauthor of the report, said the study said nothing about the power of personal prayer or about prayers for family members and friends.

Working in a large medical center like Mayo, Mr. Marek said, "You hear tons of stories about the power of prayer, and I don't doubt them."

In the study, the researchers monitored 1,802 patients at six hospitals who received coronary bypass surgery, in which doctors reroute circulation around a clogged vein or artery.

Three groups
Two were prayed for; the third was not. Half the patients who received the prayers were told that they were being prayed for. Half were told that they might or might not receive prayers. The researchers asked the members of three congregations — St. Paul's Monastery in St. Paul, the Community of Teresian Carmelites in Worcester, Mass., and Silent Unity, a Missouri prayer ministry near Kansas City — to deliver the prayers, using the patients' first names and the first initials of their last names. The congregations were told that they could pray in their own ways, but they were instructed to include the phrase, "for a successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications."

Analyzing complications in the 30 days after the operations, the researchers found no differences between those patients who were prayed for and those who were not.
Some participants complained that this mechanical way they were told to pray as part of the experiment was unusual for them.

Complications of surgery occurred in 52 percent of those who received prayer (Group 1), 51 percent of those who did not receive it (Group 2), and 59 percent of patients who knew they would receive prayers (Group 3).

CS Lewis concluded that we cannot scientifically test intercessory prayer because the “real purpose and the nominal purpose of your prayers are at variance” and “whatever your tongue and teeth and knees may do, you are not praying.”

The experiment, he concluded, “demands an impossibility.”

Take Aways

Relational
Pay attention to others and yourself
Have empathy
Healing
Pray for you
Intercessory prayers as an experiment?
Thank you for your prayers for me.