

“Embracing the Art of Medicine”***Kendra Leigh Campbell****Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, Brooklyn - NY, USA*

I recently came upon a quote written by Hippocrates, the famous ancient Greek physician who is often referred to as the "Father of Medicine." He once wrote, "Ars longa, vita brevis," which means, "Art is long, life is short." As I read those words, I was immediately stricken by their profundity. It seems that Hippocrates managed to sum up in four words a powerful concept that also conveys my philosophy on life.

After doing my research, I couldn't find any conclusive evidence about what Hippocrates actually meant when he wrote those words, and it actually doesn't matter. I know what they mean for me.

I have always been intrigued by the concept of medicine as an art. As someone who possesses both a deep interest in art and science, I've frequently found it increasingly difficult to separate the two. I'm not the first person to bring this issue up. Many essays and articles have been written on whether medicine is an art or a science. Not surprisingly, I happen to believe that it is both.

Medicine has certainly come a long way since the time of Hippocrates. The advances we've made in medicine and technology are beyond what anyone could have imagined. We now have sophisticated equipment that can perform all kinds of diagnostic tests on the human body. Some people would argue that the science of medicine has advanced so far that the art of medicine has virtually disappeared. I would argue that someone still has to read the MRI, and someone still has to explain to the patient that they only have six months to live, and someone must decide that another round of chemotherapy would do more harm to the patient's psychological health, even if it would kill more cancerous cells.

I think that the dependence upon the scientific method actually contributes to the art of medicine. One can follow all of the logical steps and perform all the statistical analyses involved in treating a patient, but in the end, it takes the subtle judgment of a human being to decide the best course of action. Not only does the physician apply an artful process to treatment, but the patient does as well. Effective treatment is based on engaging the patient. The healing process is not one-way. It involves both the physician and patient in a synergistic relationship.

I once thought that I had to make a critical choice in my life: to follow my scientific inclinations or my artistic ones. I am passionate about both, and believed that a choice was imminent. And then I found medicine. It's a field in which one can apply both a rigorous scientific method and a harmoniously applied artistic hand.

As a physician, one has to face life and death on a daily basis. Life is something that is exceedingly precious, yet is something that can be taken away in seconds. Physicians must be able to resolve this seemingly dichotomous dilemma. Perhaps art provides an answer. Art is enduring. It lives and thrives beyond death, in the same way that a person's lifework can outlive them. Is not a person's impact on future generations a significant work of art?

Physicians are a most amazing species. A good physician can apply both the science and art of medicine to the treatment of their patients. And in this capacity, they are able to truly appreciate the beauty of life, and the immortality of art.