

Danville News Column
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“Chest-less Wonders”
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While visiting an old doctor the other day, we solved the health care crisis. He had much to recommend. After all, he has been practicing the medical arts for over sixty years.

He suggested how we missed an opportunity back in WWII when the debate then centered on nationalizing the doctors themselves. Think about it: doctors entering the profession as you would enter military service. Imagine free medical schools. Of course, you'd have to make admissions very tough, admitting only the best of the best. You'd accept only those who love medicine more than most everything else in the world. But nationalizing doctors didn't happen, which allowed the drift into our current cash driven entrepreneurial model. Well, I can't blame the Docs for hustling for big bucks – how'd you like their debt load, how'd you like to be sued for 2 million dollars because you consulted a case. Or can I blame them?

Since when did health become a product to be sold? When did hospitals start shilling themselves on billboards, competing against other hospitals for customers? When did doctors stuff a cash register into the pocket of their white coats along with their stethoscope? For that matter, count the number of commercials you see on TV hawking drugs as magic elixirs to save you from weight gain, depression, erectile dysfunction, or any other possible disease you never thought you had (side-effects include nausea, headaches, diarrhea, blindness, numbness of limbs, and stupidity).

So while Congress, CNN, and Shawn Hannity bleat and bray about health care, while the nation argues about which policy changes will create a better system, let's flip the debate from the kind of changes we need to make from the *outside-in* around to us talking about the kind of changes we need to make from the *inside-out*. There are those who expect the world to change; then there are those who change themselves.

For I sure hope my doctor did not enter medicine to become rich. Now, I have nothing against making a buck, just so long as we realize that nobody deserves to be rich. I hope my surgeon and my physician (my nurse and my medical technician too) entered the medical profession responding to a calling to heal and comfort those who suffer. It's not a job. It's a profession. There is a difference. A job you do because you have to or because it feeds your ego. In a job, you keep looking at your watch until you get to do what you want to do. When called to a profession, you do it because you love it. In a profession, you profess what you value most. Do you feel called to what you do?

Some divide the world between two types of people. Humorist Jean Shepherd joked that there are those who skin and those who get skinned. Some say there are takers and givers. If you are a giver surrounded by takers, don't be surprised by being taken all the

time. Others prefer how philosopher C.S. Lewis described that there are men with chests and men without chests. We're talking about torsos, not dresser drawers or pirates.

People without chests. They have the head, brain, thinking. They have reason, the mark of the cerebral human: us as intellectual being. And they got the belly, appetite, the mark of the visceral human: us as animal being.

Both mind and belly have merit. But where is the chest, the torso, to connect them? People without chests lack an allegiance to core universal virtues -- "the seat of magnanimity," the truths and affections, the duties and principles of mercy, justice, beneficence, the Way of the good -- that connect the intellectual to the visceral, bringing moral purpose to both reason and appetite.

A chest-less wonder is the physician who checks out early because he'd rather go clubbing.

But hold it. We find them among the rest of us. I've heard of pastors who, when the phone call informs them of a parishioner being rushed to the emergency room, have replied, "Sorry, it's my day off."

What about chest-less teachers who spend school funds for union training under the pretense of continuing education, when it has nothing to do with teaching but everything to do with contracts?

The chest-less ones among us ask: It is legal? Is it permissible? Is it within my rights? Then there are those who ask: Am I acting with integrity? Am I acting for the greater good? Am I doing right?