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**The Titanic: Technology, Temerity and Tradition
What Healthcare Can Learn From the Titanic**

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Your Life Your Health

The Examiner

April 12, 2012

100 years ago today, the Titanic sank. Since that time, almost a dozen movies have been made about that tragedy and over 100 books have been written, the most recent in the past few months. As we mark the centennial of this disaster, it is possible that more and more attention will be given to the Titanic. The story illustrates at least two lessons. One was not known in 1912, but should have been learned by the loss of the Titanic, and one is not known in 2012, but should be learned by our reflecting upon the fate of the Titanic.

Trust in Technology – Misplaced

The first lesson is that trust in technology is misplaced. For centuries, the seas have been the highways of the world, but were fraught with danger. Probably no greater fear faced sailors as they left their homeports than that of their ship sinking at sea. The thought of one's ship sinking below the cold, dark waters of the North Atlantic and the image of those same deep waters leaching the warmth of life out of one's body in only a few minutes was enough to send dread into the heart of the bravest of men.

But, in 1912, technology had overcome man's fears: the Titanic could not sink! But, it did. The unsinkable was sunk; the impossible happened. And, now, 100 years later, evidence is mounting that the Titanic's sinking may have not been from an "act of God" – a killer iceberg loose upon the sea – but defective rivets put in place by men. How ironic it will be if the temerity of the men in charge of the Titanic – their "foolhardy contempt of danger" -- demonstrated by their rushing headlong into the dark night, encouraged by man's "faith" in technology, resulted in the old seafarers' worst fears being lived out again, because men used defective rivets in constructing the Titanic.

Whether true or not, the Titanic has a lesson for those of us who are conditioned to exclusively trust technology in the "brave new world" of the 21st Century.. We have been both the beneficiaries and the victims of the technology announced by the Titanic. Our lives are more comfortable, but more complex. Our lives are more materially blessed, but also often barren of meaning.

As we remember the Titanic, we should remember that it is will not be the technocrat who will help us survive and succeed in the 21st Century, but it will be those who help us rediscover meaning in life, purpose in living and faith in God. Ultimately, we will discover that it is not Windows 95, but a window into our own soul, which we desperately need. This was not obvious to those who boarded the Titanic; it should be obvious to us who have vicariously experienced their deaths. If it is not, we each will face our own "Titanic" as we place our trust in technology which is not to be trusted.

Healthcare and Technology

As we remember the Titanic slipping below the surface of the North Atlantic and settling to the sea bed over two miles below, we need to remember that our trust in the technology of healthcare cannot replace the simple needs for our need to live by the standards of activity, personal responsibility, temperance in food and drink and confidence that some things are worse than death. Man's relentless search for the "fountain of youth" has turned us to technology as the magic answer rather than magic waters or potions. Yet, the more we rely upon technology, we discover that we become more and more alienated from those around us and we live in dread of death, when meaningless life is by far the greater enemy.

What They Knew

Those who died on the Titanic knew something that we don't, and that we should learn. They knew honor, tradition and bravery. Upon hearing of the tragedy, Winston Churchill wrote: "The Titanic disaster is the prevailing theme here. The story is a good one. The strict observance of the great traditions of the sea towards women and children reflects nothing but honor upon our civilization...I cannot help feeling proud of our race and its traditions as proved by this event. Boat loads of women and children tossing on the sea – safe and sound – and the rest – Silence. Honor to their memory." Forty-eight hours later, Churchill added the following comment: "The whole episode fascinates me. It shows that in spite of all the inequalities and artificialities of our modern life, at the bottom, tested to its foundations, our civilization is humane, Christian and absolutely democratic. How differently Imperial Rome or Ancient Greece would have settled the problem. The swells, the potentates would have gone off with their concubines and pet slaves and soldier guards, and then the sailors would have had their chance headed by the captain; as for the rest – whoever could bribe the crew the most would have had the preference and the rest could go to hell. But such ethics can neither build Titanics with science nor lose them with honor."

Such thoughts, reflected upon at length should bring tears to our eyes. Today, all who embarked upon the Titanic's maiden voyage are deceased. Those who succumbed in 1919 have been joined in death by everyone who survived. John Jacob Astor and Benjamin Guggenheim, fabulously wealthy men, who died with their honor and with dignity, have now been joined by all those who survived. In 1995 Ms. Edith Haisman related how her father, Thomas William Solomon Brown, had saluted her, as he placed her into a life boat, and said, "I shall see you in New York!" He didn't. In 1997, she joined her father in death.

Healthcare and Honor

Would it not be in the tradition of the Titanic, if healthcare was first available to women and children, regardless of their financial resources, before the "potentates and swells stand first in line for care?" Would it not be that transplants and other heroic medical technology should be supplied first to children before the well insured and the wealthy? Would it not be in the great tradition of the Titanic, if men and women of means placed themselves at the end of the line for care, rather than pushing their way ahead because of whom they know, or of what they have? Would our society be stronger and healthier if

we valued honor and decency and nobility above survival? Have we not lost a great deal of our humanity when we place our personal survival above all other good in this life? We have much to learn from the Titanic, but the question is, "Can we hear?"

The Alamo and its modern implications

Some years ago, I was taken aback with the thought of this same bravery under different circumstances, as I watched the movie, *The Alamo*. When a line was drawn in the dirt, and when men stepped across that line, knowing that in the act they sealed their fate, I paused and reflected. What would make men decide to die, when they could have lived? As I mused, a thought came to my mind, "No man who was conceived on the earth when the Alamo fell is alive today." I was amused at that thought, until the concluding thought followed, "You cannot live long enough to make it worth while to compromise your convictions." If a man had left the Alamo in fear, he may have lived another twenty years. He might have lived another fifty years, but today he would be dead. If one could live to be a thousand, the inevitability of death would not make it worth while to compromise one's convictions. Death is not nearly as dreadful as dishonor.

The lessons of the Titanic, which we must learn, are that as technology gives us the ability and the opportunity to live better, and as technology gives us the ability and the opportunity to live longer, technology does not give us any reason for which to live. Also, ultimately, technology gives us no reason for which to die, and a man or woman who has no reason for which he or she is willing to die, has no reason for which to live.

As Texans "Remember the Alamo," and as we all "Remember the Titanic," let us live with conviction, with honor, with purpose, with passion. And, let us know there are worse things than death, such as living without meaning.