

University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio School of Medicine
Distinguished Alumnus Award 2012—James L. Holly, M.D.
October 13, 2012

I appreciate this more than you will know in this lifetime. I love this school. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be a physician. Many of us that were in those early classes came into medicine from other careers. I was an educator, a historian, philosopher with advanced degrees in both, when I started medical school. I fell in love with medicine under the tutelage of Dr. Forland, Dr. Pestana and dozens of other men and women of great significance.

Forty-eight years ago on December 7th, I had my first date with a young lady, she was beautiful, bright and popular and I was kind of a curmudgeon. She had asked me to marry her 15 times and I turned her down, but on February 7th, I yielded and asked her to marry me. On August 7th of 1965 at the same time that Medicare became the law of land she said –I do. There are some times when she might have responded, –I shouldn't, but for 47 years plus several months, Carolyn Bellue Holly has been at my side all through medical school and all through my professional career. I can truthfully say that as the laziest person that I have ever met in my life. **ME**, and the most misdirected, without her I truly, genuinely and sincerely tell you, I would not have been who I am today and I thank her and God Bless You.

My children, half of them are not here and half of them are, and they are the joy and the light of my life and I am so grateful for them.

Forty-three years ago, I received a letter -- my wife framed it for me so I would have it always - November 22, 1968 signed by Dr. Carter Pannill who is one of my heroes. He was the Dean of The School of Medicine when I was accepted. September 1969, I became a freshman here. That started a journey that has been the most exciting thing in my life professionally and I remember each day of it. I have clear memories of so many things, lectures and experiences.

On Wednesday, I wrote Dr. William Henrich who is presently on leave due to illness, as President of The Health Science Center and I said this:

–As Carolyn and I prepare to go to San Antonio this weekend to receive the honor which I most desired in this life to be a Distinguished Alumnus of my beloved School of Medicine, I wish to tell you and Mary (Dr. Hendrich's wife) that if I had a choice of knowing you and being your friend or receiving this award I would choose to be your friend. You have afforded me opportunities which I never imagined would be possible and I am grateful. You have extended your warm embrace to me and my family beyond anything I could have imagined and I am grateful. As Carolyn and I continue to hope and to believe for your full and complete recovery, we want you to know the esteem in which we hold you and the love which we have for both of you. —

Bill Henrich is the second bookend of my professional career. Dr. Carter Pannill was the first. I wrote to his family, he passed away this last summer, I attended his memorial service in Seguin in August and I told his family — I shall carry with me to this event the framed copy of my letter of acceptance to the 1969 entering class signed by My Dean Carter Pannill. My greatest regret is

that your father and grandfather will not be there. In my professional career, no person has influenced me more than Dr. Pannill. I could no more call him Carter than I could stop breathing. He shall always be the epitome of professionalism, leadership, scholarship and the kind of physician I have always wanted to be. You know these things but as I stand before the convocation on Saturday evening I want to know that I have laid this honor at his feet and expressed my gratitude that I knew him and loved him and that he respected me. No honor could be more valued by me. I am pleased for you to know that in my judgment Dr. Henrich and your father are men of the same caliber and cut from the same cloth. I think your father would like that.¶

These events my marriage, my colleagues in the medical school, my knowing of these two men have been those bookends. I have always been proud of my School of Medicine. I often wondered if my School of Medicine could and would be proud of me. And that has been somewhat of a motivating factor in my life. To live a life that would be worthy of the honor of my class and of my school.

I have always admired the basic science education that we received. I have admired the research, faculty, staff and work that take place here. I have based my practice on evidence-based medicine created through basic science and clinical science. I admire and respect those who go into the laboratory everyday and do arcane experiments that suddenly burst upon the scene and become the stuff of clinical medicine. I have lived the proposition with my patients that, —If you make a change, it will make a difference in your life,¶ and I can only do that because of the evidence-based medicine that we are able to practice.

It is because of that basic science the Krebs Cycle, the Adenosine Triphosphate (ATP), energy metabolism, exercise physiology and pulmonary physiology, that we are able in clinical practice now to confront all of our patients with weight management assessments, with exercise prescriptions that are uniquely prepared for them individually and with the motivation to stop smoking and stop destroying their lungs. We call it the **LESS Initiative** (L for Lose weight, E for Exercise and SS for Stop Smoking). AHRQ—The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in Washington an agency of HHS has published our LESS Initiative on their Innovation Exchange and recommended it to practices across America.

I am also proud of the clinical sciences at our school and now the Department of the Clinical-Skills Center that scarred me to death and I am so grateful that it did not exist when I was here. It is so intimidating but it is obvious that it is working remarkably well. I am so grateful that we can do population management now because of the informatics and the analytics that we are able to do. We do statistical analysis on our patients and we know for the last 14 years what your standard deviations have been for Hemoglobin A1C. We not only improve our mean, median and mode, but we also work on improving our standard deviation to make sure we are giving everyone the quality of care that they require.

We personally and publicly report by provider name on over 300 quality metrics. All of this I learned here. Everything I do everyday is motivated by the standards I saw, the examples I have watched and the people that I want to emulate in my life. We have been able to eliminate ethnic

disparities in diabetes and hypertension care. We have not yet achieved that in dyslipidemia, but we are working on it.

And, as I am proud of the basic sciences and as I am proud of the clinical sciences, I am also proud of the human sciences that are exemplified at our school. Two-and-a-half years ago I wrote the following:

—As we move deep into the 21st Century, we do so knowing that the technological advances we face are astonishing. Our grandchildren's generation will experience methods and possibilities which seem like science fiction to us today. Yet, that technology risks decreasing the value of our lives, if we do not in the midst of technology retain our humanity. As we celebrate science, we must not forget to embrace the minister, the ethicist, the humanist, the theologian, indeed those who remind us that being the bionic man and woman will not make us more human but it seriously risks causing us to be dehumanized. And in doing so, we may restore the balance between technology and trust and hope which will make us find solutions for healthcare problems as we go forward. Technology can contribute to the solving of most of the disease processes that we have but ultimately cannot solve the health problems that we have.¶

Winston Churchill is my secular hero. In 1912 when the Titanic sunk, Winston did as he often did everyday of his life even as prime minister he wrote his wife, they were apart again and he said —The attention is all on this sinking of the Titanic¶ and he said —the news is good, the great traditions of the sea women and children first have been maintained.¶ He said —I am proud of our race¶ and he said of the traditions he said —first the women and children being tossed about on the sea and the rest silence, honor be to their memory.¶

Four-eight hours later he wrote another note to his wife and he said —I continue to be preoccupied with the Titanic.¶ He said —if this had been Imperial Rome or Ancient Greece the potentates, the swells, those who were rich and powerful; would have gone first, then the sailors and the captain being in the lead of that and those who could bribe their way and to hell with rest.¶ And he said something that is instructive for us, but he said —such ethics can neither build the Titanic with technology nor lose it with honor.¶

I believe what we want to do as we pursue solutions to healthcare complex problems today is not only do we want to win with technology but we also want to do it with honor and with hope and with trust. Not only am I proud of the basic sciences and proud of the clinical sciences, but I am proud of the human sciences. I am proud of the medical humanities and ethics center here and for the last several days I have had the pleasure of participating in three lectures.

The first was about global health. I can't do anything about global health individually, but I can lead my practice to do a survey and test every patient we see from age 13 to 64 for HIV AIDS, whether they are positive or negative and whether they have high risk behaviors or not, and we have done that now for the last two years, finding several people who are positive. HIV AIDS is something you can live successfully and healthfully with if you know you have it but it will kill you if you don't.

I can treat people with dignity and respect. A physician in our community was indicted and ultimately convicted of being a molester of a minor. He was my colleague and my friend and I called him the day that his indictment became public knowledge. I said, you're my friend and I obviously object to what you have done but I want to help if I can. Over the next nine months, my wife and I befriended him, loved him and cared for him. He found that he was HIV positive, he developed HIV infection and in December of that same year my wife held his left hand and I held his right as he died. He did not have to be alone. As he breathed his last breath, I looked down at my hand which was holding his hand and his thumbnail was bleeding and the blood was dropping on my hand. I felt no panic nor anxiety. I simply went and scrubbed it carefully, not foolishly ignoring it but being thankful that regardless of the circumstances of his life, the humanity, the ethics, that we can love and care for people. I want to be an excellent scientist as a physician, practicing basic science in clinical science settings but also to do it with humanity and with compassion and love and care.

I heard a second lecture about literature and medicine, and I was reminded that everyone has a story. Have you ever listened to peoples conversations? I get my hair cut with a lot of women around. I am telling you it is startling to hear the conversations and I stay silent for fear of being mobbed if I should open my mouth. But wherever people are, they are talking on buses and public conveyances, they are in the stores and walking about and they are talking because they have a story that defines who they are.

In literature and medicine, we think in terms of great writers and published manuscripts. Though most peoples' literature is oral history and much of their literary knowledge is movies. But everybody has a story and as I am a scientist and know the Krebs Cycle and delight in the Henderson-Hasselbalch equation and love biochemistry to this day, and love physiology and the concept of physiology, I never want to lose sight of the fact that nobody is a diabetic, nobody is an appendix, nobody is a cancer of the colon, they are human beings with hopes, ambitions, expectations, desires and I want to love them and care for them as individuals.

Three-and -half years ago, I made rounds one morning and I am there quite early. The nurses said -You don't want to go into this room||, I said -Why|| and they said -the man said he is going to kill the next doctor that walks into the room.|| Well that got my attention, and I said -does he have a gun?||, and they said -we don't think he does||. I said -Fine, let's go see him||. They found two burly guys by the time I got to the room, they had run down the hallway and they walked in with me. I stood at the end of his bed, I didn't know him and I said -May I listen to your lungs?|| and he was taken aback and he looked at me and he said -Yeah||.

You know what had never happened, this man had nothing, he had no money, he didn't have a job, he had no position, he had no power, he had no fame, he had no power. He had always been treated as an object. No one had ever asked him for permission to enter his personal space. I examined him and then I listened to him for 30 minutes telling me his story. It was a heart wrenching story and I realized my job was not to treat his physical illness which was significant but my job was to treat his soul and to give him a sense of worth and value.

And I sought about a way to do that and so I gave him my cell phone number and I said –you’ve have trouble working through the healthcare system, you now have access to it through me, call me anytime day or night. Three-and-a-half years later, this man who threatened to kill the next doctor who walked in the room is my dear friend. He is still without a job, he is still has no money, he still has no power, but he has a friend and he now has value.

He was indicted for a crime he did not commit, he was convicted because he had a second rate lawyer who neglected him. Now our foundation is paying his parole cost for his parole officer because if we didn’t he would be sent to jail. Now who would ever think that a physician’s practice would be responsible for paying somebody’s parole fees? Most people would say —well it’s your fault you’ve done this, well it wasn’t his fault he is caught up in this maelstrom of negativity.

He called me five months ago and he said —well its time again, I said —well tell me how much it is and we paid the next six or twelve months. He will get off parole soon. But you know my wife knows who this man is and he called me while I was here, He needed to see me before he sees his parole officer the next time and so I made a special appointment to see him on Monday. I want to tell you something, I have never had a more pleasant experience of practicing medicine than with this man. I have seen a man’s life transformed because he has hope, trust and he has significance. And what a precious gift I can give to him.

Medicine and literature is really listening to people’s stories. If I had told you what patients in our medical home is, I have written 65 articles that are on our website if you are interested about patients in our medical home. I want to tell you it’s about knowing that everyone has a story and delighting in that story.

Thirdly, last night I didn’t attend the barbecue but I went to the Medicine and Music, what an absolute delight. Dr. Kogan is a professor of psychiatry and a graduate of Juilliard School of Music. He gave us a lecture intermixed with playing Beethoven sonatas and concertos, it was thrilling and wonderful. I wish I were trained in music but I am not; but I adore music.

You know where I learned to love music? In cartoons! I grew up in a home where there were no books and we only had country and western music, but I would go to the movies on Saturday afternoon with my friends and I would listen to the cartoons. I loved the hijinks, I was a kid, but the music was enthralling, it was classical music and I fell in love with the music and I have loved it all of my life.

As I listened to him and this issue of medicine and music, I realized that they are a metaphor for each other, if you will. The physics of harmonics and the science of equilibrium and balance are not dissimilar. It is in fact that the harmonics, it is the melody, it is the construction of the mathematical construction of music that has dissonance and has cacophony; It has a conflict and then a resolution and a beautiful melody that comes forth out of the conflict. Isn’t that what medicine really is. We have patients in the throes of illnesses that are wrecking and devastating their lives, they are out of equilibrium, either because of sociological issues or socioeconomic issues or because of health issues. _____ who had a stem cell transplant is doing very well I am delighted to say. He had to go through a crisis, a cacophony of noise to have his bone

marrow wiped out with chemotherapy. And, in the first two weeks of that he could die. But now the melody is coming forward and the harmony is returning, the equilibrium is returning to his body, and there is an enormous probability of his being cured. It is like that with medicine and like that with music.

You know there are two Greek words that have been translated into English, one of them is the word *execheo*, and you hear the word –echo in there. It has been translated in one source at the —sounding board because it means the —sounding forth and are we not each a sounding board for the melody of our School of Medicine ? Do we not daily exhibit and demonstrate to others the joy we have of being physicians and the delight we have in being entrusted with the care of people that need our care and that we partner with to help them restore their health or maintain their health? It is that *execheo*;, it is that echo as we become that sounding board.

If you listen to a piano, you know most of Beethoven's music was written for the harpsichord early on. He received his first piano forte with the expansion of the harpsichord keyboard by two octaves, one on each end and he received his first piano forte from the John Broadwood Company in England. And, he began to prepare music for the piano soft forte hard the piano forte. And as he prepared that music, it's the same way we do medicine and the same thing that we do.

There is another word that has to do with the –sounding together, it has to do with harmonics. If you take a thousand tuning forks of different frequencies and put them in this room and you thump one of them, every tuning fork in this room that is that same frequency or a multiple of that frequency would begin to sound; all others will remain silent. We learned our frequency of vibration here at this school as we were trained and taught and as we breathed deeply enculturating ourselves in the passion of healthcare; we became a tuning fork and now we sound together. The word that is translated from the Greek as —sounding together is *symphonia*. We get our word –symphony from the same thing. We are indeed the instruments of the symphony of medicine of health, not of disease. Science can help us deal with disease but the symphony of our lives, the harmony of our lives will produce the music.

One of my favorite movies, part of my literature, is *Mr. Holland's Opus*, if you've seen it you remember it, if you haven't you must. Whether you like movies or not you would enjoy this one. At the end he felt like his life was not a success. He felt like he had never achieved his goal of writing a great symphony. One of his former students who was governor of his state said to him –We are your symphony, we are the notes and melodies of your opus, we are the music of your life and so we are the music of the life of Marvin Forland and of Dr. Carlos Pestana and of all the other men and women who invested their lives in ours, coming to a cow pasture and believing that something would rise up that would be worthy of scientific excellence and basic science, clinical excellence but also in human excellence.

As we continue to live our lives I know the day will come when my instrument will be silenced. There will be some who will rejoice on that day. I am reasonably certain that in my community I will have the largest funeral that ever has existed, as many will come and say —I just wanna make sure that he is dead.

We have gathered here today for a very special purpose. I cannot tell you how much it means to me; in this life there is no honor that I would liked to have had. I have told one person only, my wife, you know some day I would hope that my life would be worthy of this, I can't tell you that I think it is but I am so grateful and I receive this with the humility: that humility will engender what humility always brings in the life of another and that is diligence and discipline. I can assure you that this will not create arrogance or haughtiness which says –look and see who I am,; but I will return to my office on Monday in my practice and will think of ways that I can live my life over the next however many years I have, twenty or thirty, in such a way that I can make you proud that you have done this wonderful thing for me. It will motivate and stimulate, it will undergird me, it will give me strength and direction. I cannot be more grateful. I cannot be more grateful for our school, for the Health Science Center, for all the wonderful things that I cannot believe that I have been blessed to be a part of. I am so grateful to you and I thank you and God Bless You.