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Caring

Robert E. Fredericks, M.D., F.A.C.P.

Two common words in our language are "for" and "about". They are usually thought of as simple connective prepositions. An important word in our profession is the word "care". But it's amazing what a difference in meaning results, depending on which of the simple prepositions follows that word — "care". The difference is not just in meaning, but much more important, a difference in loving.

I've been wracking my brain for weeks trying to find a way that I can talk to you about loving. I have been tempted to use all the obvious cliches. I have fought the annoying tendency to philosophize and theorize about love. I have been concerned that it would seem that I am trying to deliver a sermon to you, who are probably better practitioners — both of medicine and of loving than I am. Finally it occurred to me that perhaps we could share some of the problems with which I have struggled in this sensitive area and find out how we can care more *about* our patients — beyond just caring *for* them.

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Where do we start? To whom do we look? The theologians and philosophers? The psychiatrists and psychologists? Yes, they can all help, but their views are often impersonal or sometimes directly in conflict. How about the poets and novelists? Perhaps they tell us more, or at least they move us more emotionally. Where else to look? Perhaps to Lincoln, Ghandi, Schweitzer? All great and loving men — but for us, the man who cared most and did most *ABOUT* others was certainly the Carpenter of Nazareth. It's of special interest to us that He has so often been credited with being the "Great Physician", not because of his advanced medical knowledge or scientific skill, but in praise of his loving care *ABOUT* all of his "patients".

Like you, I am a Christian, and that's important. But in practice and daily preoccupation, I seem to emphasize my role as doctor far above my role as Christian. I'm beginning to realize more deeply how it matters to me as a doctor and how important it is for my patients that I re-order these priorities. I need to do as much caring *ABOUT* as I have done caring *for*.

A friend of mine loves to introduce into any discussion of Christ, the good humor and broadminded humanity of

Christ-the-Man. I wonder if we might not reveal informally to our patients a little more of our own humanity, possibly some of our own personal convictions and feelings. For example, I might have told the compulsive executive sitting in my office this week that, like him, I've been tossing in bed nearly every night, not too comfortable about the prospect of speaking before you this morning.

This is a sort of sharing ourselves with our patients. Certainly we find it much easier to love and to share ourselves with our spouses, our families and close friends. We shouldn't let this thought disturb us. We need not love our patients in the same ways of close affection. Remember that in his daily life Christ-the-Man preferred the close association of Peter, James, and John. Yet he shared himself and radiated love even to total strangers.

Well, none of you need to be told about Christ, or to be reminded that He is our model, our ideal. So now let's look to ourselves.

We can probably view ourselves with some justifiable self-satisfaction. We abide by the rules and regulations, we follow the forms and rituals of our medical societies, of our social and political communities, and of our church. We expect competence and strive for excellence in the practice of medicine. We fulfill our duties. Isn't that more than most men do? Perhaps all of us use this form of rationalization at times. We may even try to justify our lives in terms of devotion to duty. But a life which has duty as its primary goal can reach the ultimate of evil. Perhaps the best example of this was dramatically revealed at the Nuremburg trials. The Nazi defendants were men who

fulfilled their duties and claimed exemption from any other responsibility. They did their duty and the world shuddered and wept.

Obviously, blind duty is at the opposite pole from our subject — *LOVE*. Noble thoughts and ideals, such as love, are, suspect in our time. But what subject is more important? What was Christ's mission? What is His law?

One facet of this subject that I would like to consider with you is personal redemptive love, which is probably the most important aspect of Christian life. The familiar teaching — find Christ in every other man — is the simple direction we need to begin our discovery of personal redemptive love. This isn't too difficult if we realize that the Christ we are looking for in others is not so much Christ-God as Christ-the-Man, Christ as he toiled, rejoiced and wept, as he searched for and revealed truth and love among men. Our discovery of personal redemptive love can be completed when we realize that Christ has charged us with the responsibility of continuing to reveal His love to others. If we fail, then some men will never find His love.

Put in other words, we are saying that personal redemptive love requires that we search for and uncover the good in others and then let them know and feel that we care *about* them. I shall always remember the internist who was helping to care *for* me during a hospitalization. Truly, he cares *about* his patients. At the time of my illness, my wife and children were ill at home. Without any suggestion on my part, he went to my home, checked all the family, and kept tabs on them daily. When I learned of this, my own anxieties and restlessness disappeared.

You can easily understand why I have the greatest respect and admiration, and feel warm affection for this physician. In him I see qualities of the "Great Physician".

Operating on the human level love seems to function in a reciprocating way. It always seems to be a mixture of what C.S. Lewis calls "gift love" and "need love". It is very difficult to imagine a situation in which our caring about someone is not mixed in with some need or hope that lies within us. Our most altruistic caring about a patient certainly provides us with normal and needed satisfaction in the respect and affection which that patient gives us. We know, I'm sure, that our most contented patients are the ones who have been able to care about us, and responded with cooperation and confidence in our best efforts because of it.

We can think of many examples of the admixture of "gift love" and "need love". One that comes quickly to my mind involves a very elderly nun. She was obviously grateful for the medical care she had received during an illness, but what mattered most to her was that her history and daily interviews were private affairs. She learned that I needed and wanted to know about all her complaints and problems. She was assured that her medical record and all that was said between us would be confidential. She was so relieved, and very happy to share her life. Her plea to me was that I should always respect the confidence of sisters, and not imply to their superiors or colleagues that the ill nun's problems are imaginary or inconsequential. The trust and warmth of this sweet person's responses continue to remind me that "caring about" brings many rewards to the physician.

Early in my practice a college student was referred to me. After we discussed the problems and outlook of her Hodgkin's disease, she asked me to speak with her fiancée about the matter. They both understood. They were married. They moved to another city, but returned to see me many times. Their marriage was filled with more difficulties than most of us will ever know, but they were happy and I was glad. Several years later during her difficult terminal illness, she was trusting and brave. She was full of gratitude to all about her who had helped her to experience love. Through the years my patient and her husband expressed as much concern for my welfare as I felt for them. We seemed to evoke the best qualities in each other. We appreciated our "caring about" each other, and were truly enriched by it.

During this meeting you will be addressed by men whose lives reflect another aspect of love — the projection of love to all men of all times and places. This is the force which is needed to balance, to counteract, to overcome the power of evil and destruction which men's vices loose into the world. This is the love which arises from but goes beyond the discovery of personal love. It is often the closest to pure "gift love". It is caring *about* the community of man. Its goals are to create circumstances and environments in other places and times, in all places and times, so that love itself may have the most fertile fields for its growth in the world.

It might help us to understand more of this aspect of love, if we would ask ourselves a few questions: If a man must struggle constantly against thirst, starvation, disease, physical attack or fear, can he be concerned about, can he discover love? Has the cruelty of

man caused extreme deprivation or suffering of other men? Are we responsible for the alleviation of inhuman conditions in the world so that love might grow?

The answers to these questions are quite apparent. Some men have done more than just consider the questions, they have dedicated themselves to the task of responding to the needs of the community of man, with love. I think of men such as St. Damien, Dag Hammarskjold, Pope John XXIII, and physicians such as Tom Dooley, Paul Carlson, and the men who carry out

the work of the Mission Doctors Association.

It occurs to me that many of you are already experts in "caring about". I hope that during our time here that we will be able to share together other ideas that might be helpful in our "caring about" our fellow men. It is our most important work, the one to which we are committed by our faith. I think that Dostoevski described our task and our hope when he said, "we are each responsible to all for all, and if men knew it, the world would become paradise."