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Opportunities Exist

Francis C. Buckley

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Opportunities Exist

One characteristic of the physician is alertness. He must be aware of his surroundings. For the Catholic physician it is not enough to be aware and alert in medical matters alone. Every patient, be he stranger smitten on the highway or old loyal "chronic," lives deeper than the hurt he presents to his doctor. If he is bleeding and barely conscious from an accident, he is thinking of his possible imminent demise. If he has ulcers or headaches he describes his physical discomforts, but hides his spiritual dilemmas.

All of this is old hat to the physician, and he has read many books and articles on psychosomatic medicine. The point not to miss is the physician's great capability for good if the patient's spiritual life is explored. This is not for routine practice, of course, but opportunities exist. The temptation is to stick to medicine and leave religion to the clergy.

Of the hundreds who spend a little time in mental hospitals, it is amazing to learn how many do not go to Mass on Sundays. It may not be possible to know if missing Mass is the consequence of mental illness or vice versa. In any case it can't hurt the patient to be exhorted to do his best. A few words from the physician may make religion a new way of life for the careless.

This and related types of advice, such as marriage counselling, can take time, but where else can time more properly be spent? If no good is accomplished directly for the patient, or if the patient refuses to be helped, at least the physician in trying steps another rung higher on his ladder. Who else has such opportunities for good?

There was once a woman with migraine. It took several office visits to help at all but in time there was some definite relief. Skin testing yielded some clues and improvement followed the avoidance of certain foods. The visits gave opportunity to dig a little deeper into her married life. It was, unfortunately, appalling. At the physician's instigation an organized campaign was started to correct it. After several years of collaboration with clergy and attorneys, she

severed her unhappy domestic ties. Not only did the migraine disappear but the patient returned to the Sacraments. She is now a daily communicant in the Third Order. For such a reward what physician can afford to mind his own business?

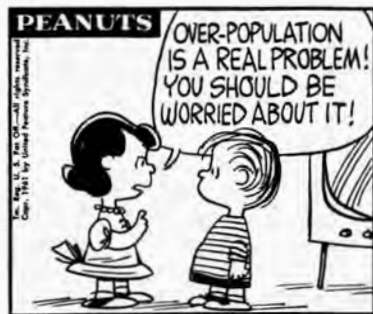
The chronic alcoholic, the adolescent member of a warring gang, the unemployed, the elderly, and the mentally retarded can be consoled, guided, and exhorted to greater spiritual effort if some physician will only dig a little deeper than the "Chief Complaint." Opportunities for good lie all about him.

Francis C. Buckley, M.D.
Foxboro, Mass.; member, Guild of
St. Luke of Boston

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