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Biomedicine vs. Biblical Medicine

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 2 Thessalonians 2:4

Review

- We said that there were lots of reasons to study Biblical health care, including having God's way of thinking about it, and proposed that if health care were indeed a spiritual enterprise, this would become even more important.
 - We looked at the history of Western thought, and how we got to today's worldview, and described this worldview, scientism, materialistic humanism. We saw how science had been lifted off of a Biblical worldview and married to humanism; their child is scientism. Saw how it explained everything about today's society and culture. Saw how the means had become an end unto itself.
- Numbers/serpent

Universals, absolutes, values, meaning, purpose, optimism, hope
Particulars, cause-and-effect, reason, facts, scientific pessimism

Recall the end result of this worldview, and think about how it affects medicine:

And it is in an important sense the ultimate effect of scientism to dissolve the absolute qualitative distinction between persons and things – the very heart of the metaphysical tradition...– reducing persons *to* things, denying man's rational soul and his transcendence of the physical, giving him a value no higher than that of a camel or a stone or any other part of nature. This reduction of the human category to the natural runs parallel with a whole series of reductions from quality to quantity, from value to fact, from rational to empirical. If the doctrine of man as rational moral being, qualitatively distinct from and incommensurate with nature, is weakened or destroyed, the grounds for expecting moral conduct are similarly weakened....This is indeed treating man as a "thing," as a "common object of the countryside," as a part of nature just like a camel. It is not only an inhumane procedure, it is simply false according to ordinary standards of reason, although it is no less widespread for that. It is the great modern religion, our established church, with a whole panoply of priests, evangelists, saints, and bishops, and massive means of publicity and propaganda. It has the power, if it is allowed to grow uncontested in enough human minds, to bring about the end of *homo sapiens*. It may indeed prove to be the abolition of man. (Aeschliman pp. 52, 55)

- We talked briefly how medicine followed this pattern, from Hippocrates to modern medicine.

Illness; heal; mind/spirit; "Why?"; context

Disease; cure; body; "How?"; content

- We also said that our task was to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2), not to be deceived by the philosophy of man (Colossians 2:8), to take every thought captive to Christ, to cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).
- **Our goal is to become Christians who live out our calling through health care, not health care providers who happen to also be Christians.**
- We then set ourselves to this task, building a Biblical understanding of health care, a framework, a solid foundation, a worldview, based upon God, His Truth, Character, Purposes, and Plans.
- We learned God's perspective and plan for man. We also learned Biblical definitions of disease and death, health and healing, and saw how God works through these things.
- We saw that health care is a parable of the Gospel. God uses health care to speak the gospel into people's lives.
- We saw Jesus Himself live this out in His practice of healing and ministry.
- We began to explore some of the implications for all of this to our practice of health care.

Now we need to take our Biblical model and see exactly how it differs from health care today. We will see what health care based on the scientific worldview (modern biomedicine) looks like, and what Biblical health care looks like in contrast.

In addition to biomedicine and Biblical medicine, we will also look at the Hippocratic tradition medicine, which formed its basis until the rise of scientism. In many ways this system was far better than today's; we need to understand its strengths, and also how Biblical medicine differs from it as well. Many today are proposing a return to Hippocratic medicine, with science in its rightful place as a tool, as a means, to Hippocratic ends. While this would be an improvement, it still differs from a fully Biblical model. So we will use the following terms:

Hippocratic Medicine

We will use this term to refer to the best secular medicine has to offer, rooted in the tradition of Hippocrates and the Hippocratic Oath, which formed the basis of Western medicine for centuries.

Modern Biomedicine

Biomedicine is the current paradigm and practice of health care, based firmly on the scientific method, and indeed on the scientific

worldview. A change occurred, as we discussed, from Hippocratic medicine to biomedicine, in the early 1900's.

Biblical Medicine

Biblical medicine refers to medicine that is firmly rooted in a Biblical worldview. Furthermore, it is practiced in the presence of God: Biblical medicine is medicine practiced by Jesus Christ Himself, as He lives in us and we live in Him, as we are His Body, and He ministers to and heals others through us.

The Focus of Health Care

Who or what is health care focused on in each model? What or who is at its core, its center?

Hippocratic Medicine

Look again at the passage by Peabody. Who or what is the focus of Hippocratic medicine, the best medicine has to offer? The patient. It is a patient-centered model. There is a movement to come back around to this, the biopsychosocial model, treating the whole patient, etc. Problem is that it ignores spiritual, or when it does acknowledge spiritual, still denies the existence of God/Transcendent, or any truth about it, and denies that there is any part of man that transcends his humanity, his material existence.

Biomedicine

Look at the quote from D.W. Selden. The focus of biomedicine is disease, its causes, and the physician's/modern medicine's ability to cure it. It is actually a self-centered model, worshipping the power of man over disease and death (and therefore over God), worshipping the power of man to do anything he sets his mind to (the Enlightenment ideal). Remember what Israel did with the bronze serpent.

Biblical Medicine

Who or what is the focus of Biblical medicine? Is it the patient? Well, certainly Biblical medicine would seek to serve and to love the patient, not just cure the disease. And it certainly is not disease-focused and self-centered. Who then is the focus of Biblical medicine? God is; He is the Great Physician, He is the One Who Heals, He is the Source, and He is the One Who is both working and speaking in the situation, and the only hope for healing. The health care provider is co-laboring with God, under His authority and sovereignty, to heal. So all around, it is God-centered.

The good physician knows his patients through and through, and his knowledge is bought dearly. Time, sympathy, and understanding must be lavishly dispensed, but the reward is to be found in that personal bond which forms the greatest satisfaction of the practice of medicine. One of the essential qualities of the clinician is interest in humanity, for the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient. Francis Peabody, M.D., 1927

...medicine is a very narrow discipline.... Human problems and human agonies are medical problems and medical illnesses only when they can be approached by the theories and techniques of biomedical science. DW Selden M.D. 1981

The Mission of Health Care

Hippocratic Medicine

What is the mission of Hippocratic medicine? It is focused on the patient, so it must be to alleviate pain and suffering, to serve the patient. Ministering to the needs of the sick and injured. Indeed, this was all it could do before the tools of modern science. Remember that the root of the word *therapy* is “to serve.”

Biomedicine

What is the mission of biomedicine? It is focused on disease and our ability to cure it; the mission of biomedicine is to conquer disease through science. Knowledge is the power to this.

Biblical Medicine

What is the mission of Biblical medicine? It is focused on God, and its mission therefore is to cooperate with and serve Him in His healing work, to be Jesus Body, to allow Him to live in us and act through us. And what God is doing is restoring the image of God in people, restoring physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, relational health and well-being. **Biblical medicine cares for people’s *shalom*.**

Definition of Health

Hippocratic Medicine

What is the Hippocratic definition of health? With its focus on relieving the pain and suffering of the patient, on ministering to the needs of the individual, health means being free from pain and suffering, function being restored.

Biomedicine

Biomedicine’s definition of health is being free from disease, being cured.

Biblical Medicine

Look back to your definition of health taken from the Bible. What does health encompass Biblically?

Definition of Disease

Hippocratic Medicine

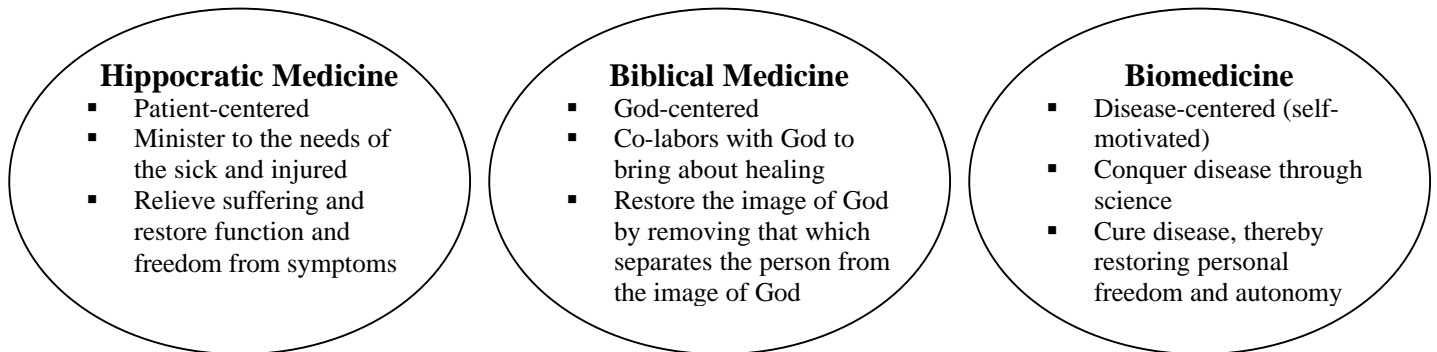
Hippocratic Medicine defines disease as that which causes pain and suffering.

Biomedicine

Biomedicine defines disease as that which limits the desires and the autonomy of individuals. Disease limits the way things ought to be, as defined by arbitrary standards of the individual and of society/culture.

Biblical Medicine

The Bible defines disease as that which tarnishes the image of God in us, which prevents us from functioning according to God's design and purposes.



The Failure of the Biomedical Model

Biomedicine is founded on a materialistic, naturalistic, cause-and-effect worldview, the scientific-humanistic worldview that we described at the beginning of this study. It has led to the paradigms of biomedicine listed above. Recall again the dichotomy that is created:

Where does the patient fit into this paradigm? Where does the patient fit into biomedicine's mission to conquer disease through science? When medicine's mission changed from healing the patient, relieving pain and suffering, to curing disease, the patient dropped out of the equation. ***Under the biomedical model, physicians treat disease, not patients.*** This is a far cry from ministering to the needs of the sick and injured, or restoring people to *shalom*. This may be convenient, less costly, easier for health care providers, but extremely dissatisfying for

Central to [the health care crisis] is the failure of the doctor-patient relationship.

C. Everett Koop, M.D.

patients. Patients want to be cared for; patients want to be healthy, not disease-free. Patients want to be the end, not the means to an end that serves biomedicine and/or the health care provider. Patients want to be healed, not cured.

The opportunity was for science to serve the Hippocratic ideal, and to allow for real ministry to the needs of patients. But it was not to be so. The opportunity still exists for science and biomedicine to be just a part of the means to the mission of Biblical Medicine.

The New Age's Entry into Health Care

This is the reason for the New Age's entry into health care. Patients' needs are no longer being met, and in their dissatisfaction they are looking to other sources for the healing they need and desire. Patients want to be treated as a whole person, and they will go to whoever will treat them as such. Ultimately, their search is spiritual, for everyone is seeking to fill the void left by alienation from God. Only God can fill the void. However, the world and the spiritual powers of evil provide many counterfeits, both in health care and in life in general. This is why there is such a connection between the New Age and health care, with the New Age movement providing many ideas about health and many alternative methods of achieving it. It is so popular because it ministers to the needs of people, it deals with their whole person, and it promises complete peace and healing. They are right about dealing with the whole person, including the spiritual. But they are wrong about how to achieve it because they fail to deal with the problem of sin and fail to seek the one true and living God for answers. It all goes back to the fundamental truths about health and disease. There is a connection between the spiritual and physical, and those who are against God are more than willing to use this connection to deceive those in need.

Issues of Life and Death

Why is the biomedical model so popular? Why did it become the paradigm for modern medicine? Are there spiritual issues behind it? Yes, there are, and it goes back to the truths about who man is and what has happened to him and his relationship to God as a result of sin.

Ultimately it is an issue of dealing with the reality of death. Death, we learned, is a direct consequence of sin. Both physical and spiritual death are punishment for our sin. Basically, death is the great intruder, the last enemy. Death is distasteful because it is an unnatural, violent separation of the body from the soul. It is unnatural because it is not what God intended. It is violent because it is God's judgment and punishment of sin, and it is so horrid because it reminds us of His

judgment. Death is the constant reminder of God's wrath against sin, which we seem powerless to do anything about; in the final analysis, we all die, and God wins, so to speak. Disease is both a progression towards death and a reminder of sin, as we have seen.

What man is trying to do is to get along without God, as we have discussed. He is trying to avoid the need for a Savior, to avoid having to admit his need. Since death and eternal separation from God is the ultimate reminder of man's need (the curse, Gen. 3:17), man engages in a struggle to conquer death. He tries to reverse the curse, so to speak, holding off death as long as possible, and attempting to halt or slow the progression of disease towards death.

With regard to patients, they look to science, technology, and the medical establishment to be able to conquer any disease and postpone any death. They realize, however, that death still is inevitable. Therefore if they cannot beat God at His game, if they cannot conquer death, then they can at least control it and cheat God of His control and His opportunity for judgment. Illness and suffering are painful reminders of God's wrath and the effects of sin, so they are to be avoided at any cost, even if it means an earlier death. Thus patients want doctors to assist in their suicide. Patients would rather die an early death than have God take their life; they think that by taking their own life, they somehow avoid God's punishment and judgment. They want to kill themselves not to avoid terrible pain and suffering (there are other ways of avoiding them); rather, they are trying to avoid the reminder of sin and God's just wrath against it reflected in the decline of the body.

The medical establishment is frustrated at its inability to continue to play God in the final analysis. The tower of Babel it has built still cannot conquer death. It cannot reverse the curse. If medical science and technology cannot (yet) defeat death, then at least it can control it. Therefore medicine, too, wants to control and manipulate death. Thus, physicians are all too willing to assist in the death of patients, with or without their consent. Medicine thinks it has the right to decide what life is worth living and who should die. Essentially, it is playing God. When medicine erases God from the equation, it begins to think of itself as a god.

The medical culture tends to ignore pain and suffering because it is ill-equipped to deal with it, and because its mission is to conquer disease, not treat patients. The medical establishment is also frustrated at its inability to prevent disease and even cure many diseases, due in large part to the inability to change a patient's behavior or life circumstances. Most of the morbidity and mortality due to disease is secondary to the behavioral patterns of patients (smoking, lack of exercise, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, etc. as well as poverty and other social ills) and medicine is not successful at dealing with these

issues, particularly when its mission is to conquer disease through science, not to heal patients and to minister to their needs.

The medical culture does the same thing with issues of the beginning of life and assisted reproduction. Convenience and control are valued, and medical technology is a means to that end. It is also being used to erase disease before it starts (aborting deformed, undesirable, or unwanted fetuses), and is moving towards genetic engineering and cloning. Man is looking for any means to erase the reminder of sin and judgment, any means to control life and death and make it subject to his power and desires.

The Future of Western Health Care

If things continue the way they are going, health care in the West is going to become untenable for Christians. We are already seeing abortions for such things as the sex of the child, eye color, etc. Soon, abortions will become almost mandatory for fetuses with diagnosable diseases like cystic fibrosis. Not that the law will mandate such abortions; rather, the health care infrastructure will not pay for the health care for these children. In a similar fashion, the system will no longer pay for end-of-life care, when all that money can be saved through euthanasia and assisted suicide. People will be financially forced into killing the unborn, the elderly, the terminally ill, and the critically ill. There will suddenly become a need for Christian hospitals who will provide health care to those the system has abandoned, and who will pay for this care.

The Cultural Ethos of Biomedicine

The interplay of all of these factors and issues and truths results in a certain cultural atmosphere or ethos in the medical and health care arena – in medical schools, hospitals, offices, and in the hearts and minds of medical professionals. Health care is its own sub-culture, with its own beliefs, rituals, and idols. The cultural ethos of medicine is a result of all that we have studied so far. In addition, the medical culture is a subset of the culture at large and therefore reflects cultural/societal trends (i.e. postmodernism). Furthermore, the medical culture is populated with men and women who are sinful and fallen, who are seeking a culture where they can feel significant and that everything is OK (trying to fill their spiritual void), which in part helps to define the culture.

Characteristics of Biomedicine's Cultural Ethos

- ❑ **Knowledge is worshipped;** recall Bacon's statement that "scientific knowledge is power." The mission of biomedicine is to conquer disease through science; scientific knowledge is the key to fulfilling this mission. Knowledge is power. Therefore the driving force is the attainment of more knowledge. This is the goal, not the means to another more noble goal. For people within the culture of medicine, he who possesses the most knowledge has power, is strong, is rewarded, and is looked up to. And those who do not have it are weak, scorned, and ignored or dismissed.
- ❑ **Disease is the focus,** not the patient who has the disease and its associated illness, pain, and suffering. Medicine's mission is to conquer disease; the patient has been lost in the equation. The goal is to cure the disease, not heal the patient. The entire system revolves around conquering disease and advancing the medical establishment and the frontiers of scientific knowledge. At best, the patient is a means to an end (knowledge, professional success, financial gain, getting the diagnosis, looking good on rounds, etc.). As a result:
- ❑ **Apathy and hostility are displayed towards patients.** Patients are scorned, viewed as weak and responsible for having disease. Patients are viewed as bothersome and demanding. The poor, weak, and disenfranchised are scorned and ridiculed. See the Pharisees doing the same thing. [is medicine pharaseeism?] There is a profound lack of compassion and caring towards most patients. Patients are also the causes of undesirable effects – another admission, more work, kept awake at night, kept from going home, etc.
- ❑ **Pride runs the system** on an individual and a systemic level. Jockeying for position, as in any other sub-culture, seeking where we can feel significant, strong, secure, important. The system is designed to exalt man and individuals, to make him feel like things are OK. Part of what separates establishment from patients – look down on someone, reminds us of ourselves, what can happen to us, what we really know lies within us
- ❑ **Cynicism is pervasive.** The system is powerless, in the end, to defeat death, and often to slow disease. The system is even more powerless to change people's behavior, or provide them with anything that offers hope, peace, wellbeing, *shalom*. Patients want it, health care providers want to provide it, but no one knows where to get it. Faced with their powerlessness to really help anyone, make a difference in anyone's life, there is a profound sense of frustration, which leads to a disbelief in anything good, noble, and pure.

- **Hopelessness and despair** are the end result. Recall the statement by Dr. D.W. Selden, “Human problems and human agonies are medical problems and medical illnesses only when they can be approached by the theories and techniques of biomedical science.” So biomedicine has nothing to offer many who are suffering and those who are dying. The very foundation of the system denies by definition the existence of anything in the patient that transcends his or her humanity, and denies the existence of anything or anyone ultimately Transcendent (God); hopelessness and despair are all that are left. There is no place for meaning and purpose to be considered either for life in general or for suffering.
- **Physical disease only** is addressed; the system is based upon scientism, a cause-and-effect, materialistic worldview. At best, psychological and social issues are pulled into the paradigm, but only when they can be viewed and manipulated from the scientific paradigm. Again, there is no room to consider man as transcendent/spiritual, or that God intervenes.
- **Arbitrary definitions of life’s meaning, quality, and worth/value** are used. Man is a material being, a body, lacking transcendence. Life is limited to this material existence. Therefore human dignity is based on arbitrary standards related to physical life and its perceived quality (perceived by the provider, society, etc.).
- **No boundaries exist** for the advancement of the cause. Medicine is willing to use any means to achieve its ends. Knowledge and technology running wild, no boundaries, whatever can be done should be done, utilitarian ethics, etc. Everything is permitted. Bacon said that the aim of science “is to extend Man’s power to the performance of all things possible.”
- **Medicine/science/technology used as means to evil ends.** Since it has no intrinsic limits, boundaries, or statements about right/wrong, value, truth, etc. then there is nothing intrinsic in medicine or science to prevent it from being used for any end/purpose. People using medicine for their own selfish or evil ends – abortion is about greed on end of doctors, abortion is about convenience, control, etc. on part of mother. People using medicine for their own spiritual ends – abortion is about choice, control, scorn for God, on part of advocates. Conquer the last great enemy, control death and disease, power, take power from God, take away any reminders of God, of sin, of judgment.

Is it any wonder why patients are unhappy, why the bed is too short, why there is balm in Gilead but no healing? Is it any wonder why the suicide and divorce rates among physicians are the highest? Any wonder why medical training leads to cynicism?

Characteristics of Biblical health care

- ❑ Wisdom vs. knowledge
- ❑ Patient vs. disease
- ❑ Healing vs. curing
- ❑ Compassion and caring vs. apathy and hostility
- ❑ Humility vs. pride
- ❑ Grace and mercy vs. condemnation and wrath
- ❑ Optimism vs. cynicism
- ❑ Hope vs. despair
- Human pain and suffering ultimately can only be dealt with by the God of all comfort. If effective treatment, or pain relief, are beyond biomedicine, what can it offer? Now it is offering suicide, escape.
- ❑ Meaning and purpose vs. cause and effect
- ❑ Treating the whole patient vs. biopsychosocial model
- Christ really healed the whole person – physically, socially, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. He was concerned with the whole patient.. He gave *shalom* care, and Biblical medicine cares for people's *shalom*. The Biopsychosocial model is an attempt to place the rest of the patient under mechanistic definitions and then treat it as well.
- ❑ Supernatural possibilities vs. naturalism/scientism
- ❑ Image of God vs. man as animal
- ❑ God vs. self
- ❑ Glorify God vs. glorify man

What does Biblical Health Care Look Like?

- ❑ Entering into health care with the overall understanding that your patient was created to be in relationship to God, and that the lack of this relationship is the fundamental disease process at work. Being separated from God is a spiritual disease that directly and indirectly affects the rest of the patient's systems – physical, emotional, mental, social. Moreover, all disease results, directly or indirectly, from sin.
- ❑ Entering into health care with the overall understanding that God is about the business of glorifying Himself by declaring and revealing Truth about Himself, and by redeeming some people in the process. Because of the nature of health and disease, God is directly speaking the gospel into people's lives, and we are there as it is happening.
- ❑ Therefore we expect to see God revealing Himself to people, and for Him to use us as part of the process as we co-labor with Him.

- ❑ Christ really healed the whole person – physically, socially, mentally, emotionally, etc. – He was concerned with the whole patient. Be sure to give examples of that. He gave shalom care, and Biblical medicine cares for people’s shalom
- ❑ Christ glorified God, and gave Him the glory and the credit. What is our posture – do we take credit for God’s work (all healing is God’s work) – OK to be thanked for caring well for someone (and even then it is Christ in us), but not to be thanked for healing someone. At best can be an agent, used by God to bring about healing.
- ❑ Biblical health care is neither disease focused/centered nor patient focused/centered, but God focused/centered. Patient centered is the best the world can offer, and is an improvement over disease centered.
- ❑ Biblical medicine is God centered – what is God doing here, what does God want to bring about in this patient’s life, how am I called to participate, as the body of Christ, as His ambassador, as the vessel in which He lives and moves and acts? How can I use the tools He has given me (including biomedicine) to bring about healing, comfort, reconciliation, redemption?
- ❑ Biblical medicine recognizes the dignity of the individual as created in the image of God, that the doctor and the patient are no different, on level playing field, etc. and that each human deserves dignity and respect.
- ❑ Biblical medicine recognizes that God does things that transcend the laws of physics, chemistry, and biomedical science, routinely
- ❑ Biblical medicine recognizes that the battle is really a spiritual one, and that demonic oppression and possession are part of the differential diagnosis, as is spiritual illness (biopsychosocial like heartsickness, alienation from God, etc.)
- ❑ Biblical medicine recognizes disease as that which diminishes the image of God in us – what a definition of disease!
- ❑ Biblical medicine recognizes that healing is restoring people to the image of God
- ❑ Biblical medicine recognizes shalom, etc. as the definition of health, and treats the whole person

- ❑ Biblical medicine rests on the compassion and love of Christ for people – WE CANNOT DO IT OURSELVES!
- ❑ Biblical medicine rests on Christ’s power to heal, Christ’s love to care.
- ❑ **It all boils down to Christ, the great Physician, living in us, caring for patients in us, as we abide in Him**

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations — these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”

It becomes every person who purposes to give himself to the care of others, seriously to consider the four following things: First, that he must one day give an account to the Supreme Judge of all the lives entrusted to his care. Second, that all his skill and knowledge and energy, as they have been given him by God, so they should be exercised for His glory and the good of mankind, and not for mere gain or ambition. Third, and not more beautifully than truly, let him reflect that he has undertaken the care of no mean creature; for, in order that he may estimate the value, the greatness of the human race, the only begotten son of God became himself a man, and thus ennobled it with His divine dignity, and far more than this, died to redeem it. And fourth, that the doctor being himself a mortal human being, should be diligent and tender in relieving his suffering patients, inasmuch as he himself must one day be a like sufferer. Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689)