

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

To Him Who Much Is Given, Much Is Expected

PAUL C. SHARKEY, M.D.

We are gradually moulded into a special area of medicine by long years of schooling, coupled with increasing clinical and laboratory experience, so that we begin to think, act, and be full-time neurosurgeons. We are turned into the academic or clinical practice stream where we quickly become even more closely channeled by the ever increasing work load with its obligations of teaching, investigation, and patient care. Teaching conferences, staff meetings, and local society and related meetings take further time from our day. We increasingly tend to choose our friends from among our colleagues. It is not long until our total exposure to the outside world decreases and we become enmeshed in our inside world. It is a simple step from here to medical and specialty isolationism, where we think, act, eat, and sleep only medicine.

But "to him who much is given, much is expected." Our obligation to medicine is great and demanding, but we are members of a society and we should participate and contribute to the betterment of that society.

Society at its simplest is seen at the family level, and society as a whole is affected and formed by its many families. Our role here is important because our children are the citizens of tomorrow and, through them, we lay the groundwork for tomorrow now. It is easy to dismiss our family obligations under the mantle of early to late hours. When we do this, we lose one of the fine threads woven through the length of our lives, for the man who has established a warm understanding and the ability to communicate with his wife has learned the rich rewards of her gentle understanding, strength, loyalty, and much needed support. We are all in awe at the vastness of space and the great distance between heavenly bodies, yet often in our own homes the space between us and the members of our families is even greater. To be blessed with children and not know them is a great tragedy. It is with our children that we have the unusual opportunity to help them attain responsible adulthood and take their active place in society. From the start they should know family security through a stable and happy home where both parents take an active role in their upbringing—not one where father is the fleeting ghost of the night who has turned over all of his obligations and pleasures from loving and being loved by them to his wife, a maid, or a teacher. They should know our love where love is not indulgence and giving in, but is 90% discipline; where we care enough to want them to grow up right. There is no rigid schedule in medi-

cine that cannot be bent or turned so that we can share in this unique and privileged area of life.

Even though the free hours in the day may dwindle to a precious few, we must not shy away from our religious privileges and responsibilities. Although we are not ministers, priests, or rabbis, we are always in the midst of those who are facing illness and death and have the opportunity to offer heart, understanding, and God to the suffering patient or family. Using our talents as we can, we should take an active personal role in our churches and synagogues. Active participation and leadership here open the mind and eyes to a better understanding of our earthly problems. We can gain much inner strength and peace of mind when we give of ourselves and perhaps, in some small way, let Him shine through us to others. We will not have used our lives properly unless we use our God-given talents in the furtherance of His work through our work. The enrichment of our own lives will far outweigh our personal investment of time and effort.

No, we have not used up all our time and energy yet—we have another important area where we must devote our talents, money, and energies: to the community, both local and national. *Life* magazine¹ commented that “Wherever we look, something’s wrong.” We are beset by many socio-economic frustrations. At times, actions are taken that are not for the greatest good to the largest number of people but are preferential because “the wheel that screeched the loudest got the oil.” We do not like many of the new legislations which have directly or indirectly affected us. We tend to retreat more deeply into our work where we feel more secure and comfortable. It is easy to say, “Let the other guy do it—they wouldn’t listen to me anyway.” We cannot become “mole” people, keeping our abilities and thoughts underground. As citizens, we have responsibilities to our community and our nation. There is much that we can and should do to influence legislation and build a political atmosphere that has in it our views and needs. If we will not take the time to be leaders, then we will be the led. To do this we must work at many levels, starting right at our daily contacts. We must educate ourselves on issues, sharpen, and disseminate our views. We must teach our children by example and precept the importance of their community participation and the honor of serving our great country. We must work to elect and re-elect men and women who know and share our general views. There is even the time when issues and stakes are such that we, ourselves, should enter the political arena and run for public office. As Dr. Walter H. Judd² said in an editorial in *Texas Medicine*, “The most wonderful thing about our country . . . is the privilege of changing things we don’t like.” But that takes effort and sacrifice. As Henry Van Dyke³ so eloquently stated, “There is a life that is worth living now as it was worth living in the former days, and that is the honest life, the useful life, the unselfish life, cleansed by devotion to an ideal.”

In no way do I want us to let down in our dedication to being the best neurological surgeons that we can. It is easy with the pressures of the day to fall into the rut of status quoism, of not keeping abreast of the rapidly developing changes in our specialty. Keep a ravenous appetite for knowledge; seek it, test it, accept or reject it, but keep informed and move ahead. At times, both sides of neurosurgical practice, academician and practitioner, lose sight of each other's values and needs. It is important that we learn from each other and, equally, that we contribute to each other. You are among the finest trained people in the world. Be proud; don't get lost in borderline areas—use your talents! No matter how much knowledge or training we have, it is of no value unless we use it.

Take an active role in at least one major neurosurgical society and give it the best that you have. If you do not like the programs or the direction that the organization is taking, get in and become a part of the planning and directing force. The rewards of your efforts are great and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you are a part of it. The spice of life is living a full life—fully. We might say, "But there are only 24 hours in a day," but, with God's help, let's do our 72 hours' worth in it!

REFERENCES

1. Life Magazine, 64: no. 8, 4, February 23, 1968.
2. Judd, W. H. The physician's responsibility as a citizen (editorial). Texas Med., 65: 31-34, 1969.
3. Van Dyke, H. There is a life. Robin's Reader, 16: no. 1, 10, 1969.