

“LET’S LEARN TO DREAM, MY FRIENDS !”

[Reflections around 1st Kings Chapter 3]

Doctors, Ladies, Gentlemen,

Thank you so much for inviting me as a guest to this, your 70th International meeting where the focus is on the art and science of medicine.

The more I learn about Paul Tournier and “Médecine de la Personne” the more humbled I feel about being asked to address the conference. I sense, though, that my independent journey through life and medicine has brought me to a position of easy harmony with the ethos of the organisation.

To me it seems clear that for the practice of medicine to be most effective it requires both artistry and science in order to address the complex needs of the most complex beings – mankind.

Our journey today begins with the tale of scientist Friedrich August Kekulé. Herr Kekulé, as many of you will know, was a German organic chemist. He was working in the field of carbon chemistry and, like others of the mid-19th century era, he had been troubled for some time by the mystery of the chemical structure of a 6-carbon fuel. Popular accounts record that one day he began to snooze in front of a fire in Ghent. His snooze led him to dream. His dream depicted atoms dancing in the form of snakes and when the snakes began biting their own tails and spinning around he woke with a start.

He realised that his 6-carbon fuel could have a formula in a novel ring formation - like a snake biting its own tail - if some electrons were shared. Hence the discovery of the 6-carbon benzene ring formula which is the ancestor of modern day biochemistry and medicine. Almost as importantly, to my mind, the event led him to utter “LERNEN WIR TRÄUMEN, MEINE HERREN, DAN FINDEN WIR WIELEICHT DIE WARHEIT” which I understand when translated can mean ‘Let’s learn to dream, my friends, and then perhaps we find the truth.’!

And so, my friends, we move to the dream of devout King Solomon narrated in our famous biblical text.

In his dream King Solomon asked to be granted wisdom to help him care for and serve his people with discernment, fairness and justice.

Solomon duly acquired unsurpassed wisdom and then used it to discern which of two claimants was the real mother of a contested baby. You may recall he facilitated the identification of the true mother by threatening to have the child cut into two halves.

The TRUE mother loved her baby in a selfless way - enough to let it live without her, rather than it being killed – and so she declared the false mother should keep the whole baby.

This revealed that she felt complete love and therefore must, in fact, be the true mother.

If we think in analytical terms,

The CHALLENGE of the threat to her baby was a CATALYST to make the woman REVEAL certain HIDDEN ASPECTS of her INNER SELF and so she FACILITATED the CLEAR ASSESSMENT of HERSELF by OTHERS around her.

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The account leads us toward a concept that I would like to share with you.

This is a simple idea which encompasses both the ART of personal medicine and the SCIENCE.

It provides three valuable clinical tools that I use in my clinical practice.

- . Firstly, a tool to help people understand their own thoughts and feelings and illnesses.
- . Secondly, a tool to describe human interactions in simple terms
- . Thirdly, it allows us to describe succinctly what a person – any person – is.

I'll repeat that:

What I'm sharing is one simplistic concept that provides three valuable clinical tools.

- . Firstly, a useful way of helping people understand their own thoughts and feelings and illnesses.
- . Secondly, it lets us describe human interactions in simple terms
- . Thirdly, it allows us to describe succinctly what a person – any person - is.

The question '**What is a person?**' could lead to complex and prolonged philosophical debate.

But I suggest that we can simply describe a person – any person - as a MULTIFACETED BEING.

'A MULTI-FACETED BEING'

I put it to you that a person is like an intricately cut diamond with an infinite number of facets. Some are visible at the front, some are hidden behind; some are available to the conscious mind, some are not; some we control, some we cannot.

Each facet represents an aspect of the person – physiological, psychological, metabolic, experiential, morality, attraction, depth of understanding, physical resilience, dislike, illness, memory of a loved one dying, maternal love, tendency to fight, tendency to care, genotype...and so on and so on and so on to infinity.

Anything and everything about a person has its own facet.

When we interact with other people a proportion of these facets come into play. The larger portion typically remains hidden or inert.

We can, to a greater or lesser extent, choose which facets we allow other people to see. Other people may, however, see facets of ourselves that we are unaware of or we would prefer to hide.

Any person we meet and any person we know is defined to us by the facets we see – and only by the facets we see.

We get to know a person more deeply by discovering more of their facets.

Investigative psychology and psychiatry portray the art of revealing and describing significant facets of an individual and using them to enhance cognitive comprehension.

A facet of a person might be wholly scientific, like a gene for colour blindness. Another might be less scientifically concrete and more indefinably artistic like 'contented'.

The beauty of this is that we do not need to separate care of a person into distinct camps of science or art – this model allows the co-existence of all genres in conceptual harmony.

We can choose any aspect of a person, whether they are well or ill and somehow establish this specific aspect's importance in relationship with other aspects of the same or another person.

In any setting, clinical or social, this would be the mechanism of being sensitive or caring.

We can describe what a person is as being the total sum of each of their facets.

A person is a most complex being!

It is a small step from recognising that a person is a multifaceted being to accepting the supposition that every one of the innumerable facets INTERACTS in some way with other facets.

So, we now find logical reasoning as to why a HOLISTIC approach to medicine and MÉDECINE DE LA PERSONNE is so important.

Any one event that is happening to an individual is influenced by everything else that is happening to the individual and to some greater or lesser extent by everything that has previously been experienced.

In the simplest clinical example, a person with indigestion pain may become extremely fearful they are suffering heart attack if a relative or friend have just died of myocardial infarction. An attentive doctor will benefit their diagnostic accuracy and their patient's wellbeing if they are skilled enough in human interactions to determine the interplay between the significant facets of the patient's experiences and fears. Revealing the linking facets to the patient allows understanding. Understanding reduces stress. Stress reduction promotes better health. Better health results in fewer future illnesses.

A patient facing operation is a classic example of a situation where hidden facets play a massive role in their comfort or distress. The anaesthetists' and surgeons' technical skills should ensure that a patient drifts into sleep, remains stable during an effective operation and awakes comfortably.

BUT : - It's the discovery of the patient's hidden facets in pre-operative meetings with surgeon, nurse and anaesthetist that adds the inner human dimension of linking facets and releasing distresses which were previously undiscovered.

Doctors' service to PATIENTS in modern medicine, particularly in the UK, has a tendency to be defined by technical skills. I have discovered that our true usefulness to THE PEOPLE who BECOME patients is defined by non-technical skills of human interaction. The better we are at recognising our patients' hidden facets, the better we become at improving or preventing their illness with their compliant help.

Effective medicine for each person should recognise the individuality of each individual. Medical practice at its best is a carefully orchestrated art form in which knowledge and science and treatments and human interactions all play their part.

My personal observation over the years is that focussed scientific medicine ALONE falls short of completeness.

I believe that the most effective and most efficient healthcare is delivered when the holistic nature of individuals is recognised and all the relevant needs of each complex multifaceted being are addressed.

So, let's ponder for a moment:

- If you were king and were asked in a dream what you wished for, what would it be ?

Solomon's wisdom was a once-off, remember !

Personally, I know I would be inspired at least by a prayer on a headstone near to my nephew's grave which reads :

*"Grant me the courage to change the things that I must change
And grant me the serenity to accept those things I cannot change
BUT grant me the wisdom to know the difference."*

At the moment, at this stage of my personal journey, I think the most altruistic wish on behalf of patients everywhere would have to be the plea that all doctors, nurses, therapists and carers be able to recognise the holistic needs of individuals and that the service be able to provide comprehensive 'médecine de la personne'.
