

Art and Science in Medicine

Dr. William Osler (1849-1919), a Professor of Medicine at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, U.S.A., said that medicine is an art based on science. Dr. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) said similarly that medicine is not only science but also an art, with which a physician's individuality interacts with that of a patient. Dr. Schweitzer's words carry weight, as he changed his career from art to science. Originally a musician and a scholar of philosophy and theology, he entered medical school in Germany to become a physician and went to Africa to provide medical and surgical services at the age of 38.

Introducing these two as forerunners, I will discuss how technological knowledge in the realm of science can be applied to patient care in medicine, in a manner suggestive of a musician's performance.

In pre-modern Japan, physicians practiced medicine somewhat as an art, by using simple tools and resorting to alternative methods such as hand-touching. Modernization in the mid-19th century brought progress and sophistication of medical science, but in turn it diminished the artistic component of medicine.

Japanese word for a human being is written with two Chinese characters 人間. The characters originated in ancient China, referring to the human condition of interacting closely with those around them. That is, a human being is presumed to relate to others, or he or she can not live well alone.

The definition can be extrapolated to the relationship between a physician and a patient. By accepting, and interacting with a patient as a whole person, an internist becomes a human being in a true sense, and hence a model for all physicians.

As such, an internist is best-suited to preserve Quality of Life (QOL) of the patient, because it is an internist's duty to observe how the patient is suffering, not only physically but also mentally, socially and spiritually. Drawing from my own experience as an internist, I will present ways to provide holistic care to the patient from a bioethical point of view.