

Personal Canon Guidelines
Humane Medicine – January 2010
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Over the course of the month, each student will develop a list of ten books, works of art, music and films which resonate with her or him. In doing so you may consider the three great eternal questions: Where do I came? Where am I? and Where am I going? The thesis is that spending time with the creations of great minds is essential to being a compleat physician, healer, care giver, in short a realized person..

Students will select ten books, poems, essays, musical pieces, works of art, films that have greatly influenced them and which they want to share with others. These need not be classics. The distinction Horace makes in *Ars Poetica* fits here. He differentiates good authors (those who simply delight) from the great ones (who mix the useful with the sweet: "qui miscuit utile dulci."

Each canon will run approximately ten pages and creativity will be encouraged. The class canons will be made available to all interested parties on a dedicated blog. It will form part of a core humanities library for premedical students and other interested parties.

"'He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry out the wealth of the Indies. (Emerson)' There is then, after all, creative reading and study as well as creative writing.

Abbreviated Canon Example
The Canon of David J. Elpern, M.D.
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1. The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson has guided me for decades. In December, I always appreciate "the certain slant of light." One can read them as refreshing snacks, or reread them years later and see new levels of meaning.

2. The Life of William Osler by Harvey Cushing

Won the Pulitzer Prize in 1926. It's a thick tome - over 1300 pages long. Osler comes across in these pages as a scientist, a clinician, a bibliophile, a jokester, a humanist and much more. Well worth the effort

3. Medical Nemesis by Ivan Illich

This is one of the first modern books to inform the public about the juggernaut that is the Health Care System. The thesis is stated early in the book: "The greatest threat to the health of the commonweal is the medical profession.

4. Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

Among the most influential works of the 20th C. At times, Frankl's personal and professional discourses merge into a style of tremendous power." Frankl writes. "After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips." A must read.

5. Closing the Chart by Steven Hsi

Written while the author was dying of Takayasu's aortitis, this is profoundly moving and important. It gives caregivers and patients an insight into the country of the ill and teaches even seasoned health care providers many lessons we were never taught.

6. The Care of the Patient by F. W. Peabody

Peabody's essay is the most important article on patient care ever written. It is short. All care providers should read it every few years. It used to be on the web - but not any longer - I will try to place it my website

7 A Taste of My Own Medicine by Edward Rosenbaum

This gem was made into the movie - "The Doctor" - and predictably, the book is much, much better. In it, an elderly rheumatologist chronicles the lessons he learned when he developed laryngeal carcinoma. He is a gentle man with profound insights and the book will enrich students and physicians alike

8. Middlemarch by George Eliot

Arguably the finest novel in the English language. It takes a bit of discipline but is brilliant, captivating, memorable. Tertius Lydgate is one of fictions most memorable physicians and one of the first to be portrayed in literature.

9. One Hundred Days by David Biro

A memorable and important read. In clear, compelling prose, the author describes what it felt like to undergo a bone marrow transplant, to be hospitalized in isolation for eight weeks, to deliberately destroy his immune system with radiation and chemotherapy, to have bone marrow transplanted from a healthy donor, and finally to endure the agonizingly slow, painful and depressing period of recovery.

10. P.S. Julia by J. Fox Garrison

I "discovered" P.S. Julia quite by accident. It moved me greatly and I think it is a must read for patients and all care givers. Every day, I see patients who would benefit from sitting at Julia Fox Garrison's feet.

Lagniappe:

Why Read? by Mark Edmundson

Edmundson tells us that: "The purpose of a liberal arts education is to give people an enhanced opportunity to decide how they should live their lives" and that literature is "*the* major cultural source of vital options." This book opens one's eyes and makes one feel as Keats did, "like a watcher of the sky/When a new planet swims into is ken."
