

## Foreword

What is the most important thing in your life? For many of us, it is our families. Some would say their country, God, or the future of Earth. I'd like to share something that is very important to me, and I'd like it to reach a large audience because I think it could make a difference in what's important to many people -- the lives and health of their families. I want to share a vision.

Imagine you live 100 years ago, somewhere in a town or small village, and your 5 year old child is sick, confined to bed with a fever, delirious. Imagine the helplessness as you look on, sitting in the still, dark room, anxious to fight for your child, armed only with hope. Then you hear a knock at the door. It is your doctor, who delivered you a generation ago, watched you grow up, and delivered your child now lying helpless again. Your doctor, your trusted counselor, the only person who might save your child, walks in and seems to understand instantly -- by the darkened room, the look in your eyes, the flushed face of the child -- understands and knows what to do. You feel no longer alone in your desperation, and you think now you may have a better chance...

One hundred years ago, that doctor made little difference in whether a child lived or died. There were no tools, no weapons to fight disease like we have today. But doctors then held a special place in patients' lives. They were connected, committed, and caring members of your community. They helped you in your life and death struggles. They shared your joys in life and your grief in death. That trusted, caring relationship was the soul of the medical profession.

Now imagine something a little different, and more realistic today. Imagine sitting with your 5 year-old child in an examining room, waiting for the doctor to tell you the results of recent tests. Your child has been tired lately, and bruising easily, and her color doesn't look right. The on call doctor ordered blood tests last week. You've been worried sick, wondering...

The door opens with a quick knock, and your doctor walks in. You met six months ago at a well child exam when your employer changed insurance, but you know your doctor does not remember you or your child. After a brief hello, silence fills the next minute as the doctor studies the chart, flipping pages a few times. Your child looks up at you expectantly, and you try a reassuring smile. Two minutes later you have learned that it is cancer, that the chances for cure are good, that she will be referred to a child oncologist at a nearby university hospital, that a nurse will be in shortly to help make those arrangements, that the doctor is very sorry, and that it is important never to lose hope. Your chest is too heavy to breathe, the room lights seem to swim, and as you look at your child's face, you realize you have no memory of the doctor leaving the room.

I chose these two scenarios for their obvious emotional impact, but make no mistake: They are real, and not embellished. Older physician colleagues have related their experiences from those early days. And like most of you, I have seen today's health care system in action.

Now I will ask you to indulge me just once more. Imagine that doctor from 100 years ago -- someone you have known for years, someone you trust and respect, someone who genuinely wants to shoulder your burden -- imagine that doctor in that examining room with your child's test results today. Imagine your child's face lighting up with the knock on the door and the familiar greeting. Imagine the words, the caring eyes, the reassuring explanation, the time to answer questions. Imagine feeling anchored rather than abandoned. Imagine, please, having the soul restored to the doctor-patient relationship.

We have lost our way. We have drifted. We have been distracted by complex insurance, government, and employment demands. We have been dazzled by the miraculous march of medical technology. Over the years, we have lost the sole indispensable core of medicine, the patient-physician relationship. But we can regain it. If we are to achieve our full potential for health and well being in our lifetime, we must begin by restoring the soul of medicine. And the first step is to see it -- envision what health care could be. What it should be.

Imagine.

I am proud to have worked with John in the preparation of “Live Long, Die Healthy.” This book holds forth a vision of what health care can be and should be. Patients taking responsibility for their own health and doctors and patients working as partners to enhance health and wellness; that is a future truly worth having.

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