



# WESTCHESTER PHYSICIAN

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### JOIE DE M`EDECINE

**PETER ACKER, MD PRESIDENT**

I think it is fair to say that the practice of medicine despite its many challenges provides most of us with a great deal of satisfaction. There is no question that the daily engagement with patients and their travails can be deeply moving. Yet there can be times when the quotidian nature of our days, when it seems we are doing the same thing over and over again can lead to a mild ennui. We often yearn for the unusual and unexpected and from time to time we are rewarded for our patience when something truly remarkable happens, like making an obscure diagnosis or finding just the right words to comfort.

Last week I attended a very interesting grand rounds at Greenwich hospital. It featured Dr. Karen Santucci, Director of Pediatric Emergency Services at Yale New Haven, who presented a series of unusual cases, what we used to call "fasinomas". Of course, these true cases were accumulated over many years and certainly were not examples of a typical shift in the emergency room. Clearly we have to be well equipped to deal with the daily problems which we usually are by dint of repetition. It is a special challenge to keep the rare and subtle possibilities on our diagnostic radar without distracting our attention from the common. Every once in a while it really is a zebra making those hoof beats outside our window (perhaps an escape from a local zoo – hey it's possible) and we have to be nimble in our analysis of our differential diagnoses.

After her talk I found myself thinking of the occasional obscure things I've diagnosed and how invigorating and satisfying that is. Then my mind took a different turn and I began to think of the rare events that occasionally occur that are of no great diagnostic moment, but instead liven our days in entirely different ways. For example, I was once counseling a teenage girl who appeared quite depressed. I was talking to her alone while her mother waited outside. She entered the room with a mournful expression and sat down on the examining table. I was standing and talking with her and in an attempt to show empathy I maintained eye contact while backing up a few steps which caused me to misjudge where my stool was positioned behind me and I fell flat on my rear end. This elicited peals of laughter from my patient. Her mother hearing the commotion, burst in and when she saw me also

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**PETER ACKER, MD**  
*President, WCMS*

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*FROM THE GUEST EDITOR...***RIGOR OF ANGELS \*****BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD, IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**

I recently read this book by William Egginton. Although I was attracted to the book by its content—the unconventional perspective of our sense of reality by three very different men in history, Immanuel Kant, Werner Heisenberg and Jorge Luis Borges- I was also intrigued by the title. Let me explain.

It is very well written and does burn one's brain as it courses through the deep thinking of the ultimate nature of reality—***What is real versus what we as humans perceive?*** The author undoubtedly chose these three individuals whose approach to the subject attacks the very crux of the issue from either a philosophical, theoretical physics or literary expertise. All three converge on the underlying issue and ultimate conclusion.... ***Reality is not necessarily a separate entity*** by which we observe through various scientifically and contemplative techniques, rather it is determined by our very observation and sensing of it. We create what is real or at least affect it when we observe it. The very act of observing it is creating a reality we are perceiving and using to exist in our own world.

Kant would say that there is no objective truth out there that we are able to observe through our senses and intellect. We are limited by our subjective impressions and therefore will not achieve “divine” knowledge. But we can use our perceived form of knowledge to develop moral principles within which to live.

Heisenberg would say although Einstein theories described closely the cosmic world of what seems to be universal physical truths, there was a different explanation at the subatomic world, following different laws, which ultimately challenged Einstein's theory of relativity and his fudge factor (cosmological constant) that he conjured up to dismiss the new thinking. Heisenberg was able to identify that there is enough uncertainty at the subatomic level, that the definition of structures is affected by our observations of them thereby creating a whole different set of physical laws to be applied to the subatomic world.

Borges would say that thinking requires the ability to determine differences and differences are the sense of one thing being not the same as another which is an observationally defined or imposed difference on the very entities being observed.

So ...

.....if our observations are inadequate to identify an ultimate existential reality (essentially an Aristotelian form, or a “divine” creation—you decide your flavor for the description of an ultimate truth),

.....OF.....

*(Continued on page 9)*

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE****JOIE DE M' EDECINE****PETER ACKER, MD PRESIDENT***(Continued from page 1)*

started to laugh. Even my staff got into the gaiety. I have discovered the cure for adolescent depression, I thought, an accomplishment akin to Alexander Fleming's aha moment over a petri dish. Bit hard on my backside, but worth it nevertheless.

Here is another example: years ago I was administering an injection to a girl. Her younger brother who was about three years old hurled himself at my back, pounding me with his tiny fists, obviously outraged at what I was doing to his older sister. I saw him not too long ago, now a strapping 19 year old. As he entered the room I held my hands in a protective way and told him I was going to be very careful and not turn my back on him, lest I encourage another stealth attack. He laughed, "are you ever going to forget that?" No, some things are unforgettable.

Then there was the time I chased a preschooler who had bolted from my office in order to escape a shot. I caught him outside dashing towards the peril of the parking lot. I heaved a sigh of relief as I carried my wiggling charge back into my office. "Child hit by car while being chased by pediatrician" was the headline I was imagining – wouldn't be good for business!

And one more: after examining a child who had a common cold, the father asked me, "Doc, do you mind looking at this rash on my leg?" Not an uncommon query in my experience. It so happened that this particular father was not any father, but was employed as an editorial writer for the New York Times. He pulled up his trouser leg and I leaned forward to peer at what was really a non-descript eczematoid eruption of no real consequence. I gave it a careful look and wondered, should I? - I may never have this opportunity again. Finally I lifted my head and intoned, "Sir, I believe this is creeping liberalism." He looked at me for a few seconds and then got the joke and burst into laughter. Indeed, in all the 25 years that have passed since then, I have yet to see another rash on the leg of an employee of that august institution.

It is experiences like this that enliven the often staid days of the primary care physician.



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**STOP THE TRAIN****Elliot Barsh, MD**

***"Our homes and hearts are spacious enough to hold all of us, our beauty and our brokenness, our heartache and our hope"***

Hi everyone.

I hope our column finds you well.

Passover is the story of the Jewish people whom after hundreds of years of harm and humiliation, were ultimately able to walk toward liberation.

As the holiday concludes, the story continues, its lessons and the example it sets for us remain vital and alive.

At the Passover seder, we sit together and tell a story that all of us share.

A story that is timeless, full of hope and doubt, anguish and fear, uncertainty, and ultimately love.

We ask questions, humbling ourselves because we don't have all the answers.

We come to understand that in spite of our differences, we are all "plagued" by circumstances and conditions that are not in our control.

We learn that no matter how dire things are at the moment, or how lonely and disconnected we may feel, we are not alone.

We open the door and welcome change.

We learn that taking the time to know and understand one another, to see ourselves in each other, makes anything possible.

Thanks for reading.

Be safe.

E

*(Continued on page10)*

The Westchester Academy of Medicine  
&  
The Medical Student Section of New York Medical College  
Invite you to join them for a

# Wine Tasting

Thursday, May 2, 2024  
Prospero Winery  
123 Castleton Street  
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Come and listen to our own WCMS Members talk about their wine making experience and sample some of their award winning wines.



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and

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6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Networking Reception

7:00 p.m.

Buffet Dinner

Installation of 2024-2025 Medical Society & Academy Officers

***Remarks of Peter Acker, MD***

*Outgoing WCMS President*

***Remarks of Kham Ali, MD, MBA***

*Incoming WCMS President*

***Tara Buonocore-Rut, MHA, President & CEO***

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## 2024 MSSNY HOUSE OF DELEGATES

On Friday, April 12 the Medical Society State of New York convened its Annual House of Delegates meeting in Uniondale, Long Island. All of our delegates from the 9th District who attended participated in the in-person reference committee hearings along with business of the House throughout the weekend. Our district submitted 13 resolutions to the House with the full support of each 9th District County. The final actions of the House can be found on the MSSNY website. We would like to thank all of our delegates for their hard work once again this year. They represented not only their counties and the district, but the House of Medicine. The work they do shapes the policies of MSSNY and many go on to contribute to our legislative efforts throughout the year. We would like to thank our Westchester delegates specifically: Peter Acker, MD; Bruce Molinelli, MD; Marshal Peris, MD; Thomas Lee, MD; Joseph Tartaglia, MD; Alyssa Lee, Medical Student; Daniel Gold, MD; Andrew Kleinman, MD; Bonnie Litvack, MD; Molham Solomon, MD; Jeffrey Jacobson, MD; Kira Geraci-Ciardullo, MD and William Frishman, MD. Please accept our deepest appreciation for all the time and effort you put into serving throughout the year.



## MSSNY 2024 Final Actions of the House



FROM THE GUEST EDITOR...

**RIGOR OF ANGELS \***

**BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD, IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**

(Continued from page 2)

if our observations have created the reality,

.....or.....

if our observations have altered the reality to create a difference that we can thereby perceive, e.g. the electron is not anywhere in particular until we are looking for it, and it has no definite specific features of mass or energy, until we choose to look at it by which to compare it (and we cannot define both simultaneously —either we measure its energy or its momentum, but cannot describe both at the same instance)

.....then.....

what do we do with this information?

(Wow, heavy!.... Let's take it down a notch for a moment).

I am blessed to have three great children one of whom is my son who is pursuing his PHD in quantum physics. I continue to bother him with a father's discourse on a very interesting subject to me for which I really have no formal training, mathematical, philosophical or literary. I just find it fascinating. I like to think I'm effectively dabbling, but this is my own self constructed reality. So he will humor me (he's a good kid) despite my tenacious heckling with questions about quantum physics and details, which I cannot completely grasp, and with concepts which are still confusing. He graciously does a good job in dumbing it down for me, so I step away from our conversation feeling I have a better understanding of what is not really meant to be understandable.

But after our latest conversation, talking about whether an electron is a particle or light energy, and me asking why it is that way (like a little boy asking his father why the sky is blue- talk about role reversal!), he quite definitely said (in a patient but rehashed fatherly explanation), it doesn't really matter **why** it is, what matters is **how** we use it in the macro world. So who really cares what the reality is out there, and even less importantly, why it is that way, but what we care about is how we under-

stand how to use the perception we have of that reality to live in the every day. We abide by classic physical laws so we know that almost absolutely, if we let go of a glass in our hand, it will fall down. To be pure about this, that is not 100% true mathematically speaking, but close enough so that you don't intentionally let go of the glass, hoping it will fall up. That would make as much sense as playing Powerball and expecting to win.

Anyway, the point being we exist in a practical, or pragmatic world where we utilize the closest estimate of the laws of physics (both classical and quantum) to achieve an existence in our perceived reality: build homes, fly on planes, develop computers, communicate by the internet, travel in space.....).

In addition to maneuvering physically in our perceived world, if you are Kant, among many others, you believe we use our perceived sense of reality to develop moral codes by which to coexist.

Ok let's bring this back to medicine relevance. As you can see the content is intriguing, but I did mention that the title was intriguing to me as well, for a different reason. Egginton's title comes from a short story of Borges ([Tion, 1940](#)) depicting a *world where an unwitting people's reality is controlled by an intelligent secret society. He writes,*

*"Spellbound by Tion's rigor, humanity has forgotten...that it is the rigor of chess masters, not angels" [that subsumes reality].*

Wait! Are we just in an ultimate simulation? .....

(that is for another discussion at another time, perhaps accompanied with imbibing spirits).

I connect a more literal interpretation of the title "Rigors of Angels" to our medical profession. I think, it has a resonance to it that hits home. For the most part, we are a charitable, caring, empathetic profession who are undergoing enormous stress strain and pressure to continue to practice medicine. Our rigor is ever apparent, yet our goals remain virtuous, perhaps even angelic.

Incorporating the title with the book content and applying it all specifically to the profession of medicine, perhaps, just perhaps, our perception of

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*FROM THE GUEST EDITOR...***RIGOR OF ANGELS \*****BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD, IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT***(Continued from page 9)*

reality is more important than reality since it is our perception that we will utilize to act practically. Yes, we may actually have a laundry list of onerous administrative and regulatory challenges, but somehow we still find a way to perceive the good in the practice medicine. It is rigorous, but still achieved, somehow. It is honorable and virtuous and helpful and good, all features attributable to angels. We exist with medical imposing obstacles, but still find a way to overcome them to deliver care while maintaining a moral code, the patient -physician bond. That's tough to do as the surroundings seem sabotaged against us, yet we endure.

So if you are in the mood for a deep thought on the ultimate nature of reality, perception, free will, the cosmos, the subatomic world, purpose, morality, I highly recommend this book.

But maybe wait until you have time to read it... you've got enough going on..... living practically within the confines of what you are perceiving at work is hard enough and you certainly don't yet have the time to grapple with the "why" of it....

but make sure at some point you do find time for yourself to think about it ...before the rigor of mortis sets in.

\*\* The Rigor of Angels: Borges, Heisenberg, Kant and the Ultimate Nature of Reality, William Egginton, Pantheon 2023

**STOP THE TRAIN****Elliot Barsh, MD***(Continued from page 5)*

*"Let your memory teach you empathy and your suffering teach you love."*

**Passover's Radical Message Is More Vital Than Ever**

The Bible insists we turn our pain into understanding, love and empathy.

*"Asking questions can help us learn how our patients actually feel and who they really are."*

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*"It is never too late to see the ordinary miracle we are a art of."*

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*"Our words become language, which helps us share ideas, that enable us to understand each other and ourselves."*

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**They Lacked Nothing***by Rabbi Deborah Silver*

At this time  
both in the past  
and in the present  
we walk through water.

In awe and disbelief  
we watch as every shade  
of blue and green and gray  
stands to attention.

If we touch the walls  
they give way just a little  
and some say  
we can reach through  
to pick the sweetest apples  
we have ever tasted.

As once again  
we walk, chastened,  
carefully into the new places  
let us try  
to find the apples.

May we taste their sweetness  
may it sustain us  
may they be  
our new bread.



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## MSSNY Podcasts

MSSNY

The Medical Society of the State of New York has created a number of podcasts on topics that are timely and relevant. In addition to weekly MSSNY Updates from the Division of Governmental Affairs, there are myriad timely and relevant podcasts on COVID-19 (both for physicians and patients) as well as a number of others on veterans, adult immunizations and emergency preparedness.

- |                 |              |
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*Click on the podcast titles to listen*

### MSSNY Announces two NEW Podcasts on COVID-19

#### ★ A Discussion on COVID Vaccine for Patients ★

MSSNY President, Dr. Bonnie Litvack, President-elect, Dr. Joseph Sellers and Dr. William Valenti, Chair of MSSNY’s Committee on Infectious Diseases discuss vaccines currently available for COVID-19 and answer many questions patients may have about the vaccines.

#### ★ How to Talk to Patients About Vaccine Hesitancy ★

Dr. William Valenti, Chair of MSSNY’s Committee on Infectious Diseases discusses the history of vaccine hesitancy and offers sage advice to listeners on talking to vaccine hesitant patients.

**★★The additions of these podcasts marks 100 podcasts published on the MSSNY Podcast website!★★**