



"Of all men in the profession the forty-visit-a-day man is the most to be pitied. Not always an automaton, he may sometimes by economy of words and extraordinary energy do his work well, but too often he is the one above all others who needs the refreshment of mind and recreation that is to be had in a well-conducted society." Sir William Osler

WHAT DOCTORS ARE SAYING AND WHY IT MATTERS TO EVERYONE

The Physicians Foundation, founded in 2003, is a nonprofit organization comprised of physician and non-physician leaders from 20 state and regional medical societies. It seeks to advance the work of practicing physicians and to improve the quality of healthcare for all Americans. In 2008, The Physicians Foundation conducted a survey. It mailed "The Physicians' Perspective; Medical Practice in 2008" to a total of 320,000 doctors—270,000 primary care physicians and 50,000 specialists. They received 12,000 responses; approximately 9,000 were from primary care physicians. The survey results were compiled and released in November, 2008. The overall margin of error for the entire survey was .93%.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: 12,000 Physicians Reveal Their Thoughts on Medical Practice in America was published in 2010. Its content has been cited in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *CNN* and *National Public Radio*. Following are excerpts from this book. They paint a clear picture of what doctors are thinking and how they are feeling and how their thoughts and feelings directly impact all of us—individuals, corporations, old, young, rich, poor, healthy, ill, etc...



"It is not the patient's duty to reflect on the physician's frame of mind or to speculate on how the physician regards the current state of the medical profession... And yet how physicians feel about being physicians has real and important consequences for patients and for the viability of the entire healthcare delivery system. (Pages 1-2)

"Though medicine has evolved technologically and in many other ways in recent years, doctors remain the indispensable providers of patient diagnosis and treatment... When serious illness or injury strikes, one's sole objective is to see a doctor. Not a nurse, an allied health professional or an alternative medicine practitioner. A doctor... Very little of significance takes place in medicine today that is not ordered by, monitored by, tested by or performed by a physician. Yet as vital as they are the presence and availability of physicians often is taken for granted. (Page 2)

"Physicians are not a naturally occurring part of the healthcare landscape. They are the end product of a long, arduous and expensive education and training process. Physicians are essentially a category of scientist and must complete the highest levels of training required by virtually any profession. (Page 3)

"The federal tax code 'only' runs to 11,000 pages, while the Medicare regulatory code by which physicians must abide is 130,000 pages long... **Indeed, the American Hospital Association has estimated that physicians must spend one hour on paperwork for every hour they spend seeing patients.** (Page 6)

"...how physicians feel about being physicians is a vital healthcare policy matter. (Page 8)

"Our concern is that the medical profession itself is under duress and that the healthcare care system is creating conditions that, by eroding physician morale and accessibility, will erode quality of care for all Americans... The declining state of physician morale is a problem familiar to those who are related to physicians, to those who are friends with physicians, or to those who interact with physicians through work or other venues. (Page 12)

"The Physicians Foundation's purpose in delving into this matter was not to determine whether physicians are content or discontent with their profession. The purpose was to determine whether how doctors feel about medical practice is likely to affect access to patient services and, by extension, overall quality of care in the United States. (Page 12)

"How bad is the shortage of physicians likely to get?... Projections vary... 200,000 physicians by the year 2025... a less dire but still sobering deficit of over 96,000 physicians by 2020. (Page 15)

"In 2006, the American College of Physicians, which is the internal medicine professional society, issued a report stating '**primary care, the backbone of the nation's healthcare system, is at grave risk of collapse.**'... The situation is equally bad or worse in family practice. In 2004 the AAFP [American Academy of Family Physicians] issued a report stating '**primary care will cease to exist in 20 years if changes are not made.**'" (Page 16)

"What did the survey say? For the most part, it painted a sobering picture of the current state of the medical profession, one that has profound implications for healthcare delivery and reform:

- 78% believe there is a shortage of primary care physicians in the United States today.
- 49% of physicians said that over the next one to three years they plan to reduce the number of patients they see or stop seeing patients entirely, by retiring, working part-time or by seeking non-medical jobs.
- 94% said the time they devote to non-clinical paperwork in the last three years has increased, and 63 percent said that the increasing paperwork has caused them to spend less time per patient.
- 76% of physicians said they are either at 'full capacity' or are 'overextended and overwhelmed'

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- 78% of physicians said that over the past five years the practice of medicine has become ‘less satisfying’
- 78% of physicians said that medicine is either ‘no longer rewarding’ or ‘less rewarding’
- Only 6% of physicians described the professional morale of their colleagues as ‘positive’
- Only 28% of primary care physicians would choose to be primary care doctors if they had their careers to do over. 1% would choose a different area of medicine and 27% would choose not to be a physician
- 60% of doctors said they would not recommend medicine as a career to young people (Pages 21-22)

“The survey clearly demonstrates that physicians have reached the tipping point when it comes to the practice of medicine, a trend that will significantly affect patient access to their services now and in the near future.” (Page 22)



Chapter Five – IN THEIR OWN WORDS

At the Breaking Point

“I believe most primary care physicians are at the breaking point. There needs to be a grass roots effort to make everyone aware of this.” (Page 44)

“Something has got to be done and urgently to assist physicians...and help those of us who are burned out to find renewed joy in seeing patients...The whole thing has just spun out of control. The days of seeing patients as people and establishing relationships are done. I plan to retire early even though I still love seeing patients. The hassles are just too burdensome.” (Page 44)

“My advice to policy makers is to wake up and deal with the primary care crisis before it’s too late.” (Page 44)

“I’m beat, tired and under appreciated. Sometimes I cry myself to sleep wondering why I got into all this. Am I paying myself this month: Do I have enough to pay this month’s debt and lease?” (Page 44)

“I’ve had one nervous breakdown already and would rather not do that again!” (Page 45)

“I am so mired in this mess that I can’t see clearly enough to give any good advice.” (Page 45)

“There are too many regulations, too many middlemen, too much paperwork, too little time to see patients leading to missed or delayed diagnosis, all of which is demoralizing to physicians because we can no longer put patients first.” (Page 46)

“I can’t work any harder...People think I’m wealthy because I’m a doctor, I have no personal life. I could go on and on.” (Page 46)

“Medicine is no longer a calling. It is a losing business opportunity. This is why America’s best and brightest no longer choose it as a career.” (Page 47)

“Family medicine and medicine in general are at the breaking point, we cannot continue to practice in an environment with such declining reimbursement, more demands on our time, and overall personal and professional dissatisfaction...It is time to make changes in our healthcare system for physicians and especially for the ultimate benefit of our patients. No matter what we can’t take care of patients if our doors are closed.” (Page 48)

“We are not gods, but neither are we slaves.” (Page 49)

“...the malpractice climate has become a nightmare!” (Page 49)

“The practice of medicine has been degraded by the insurance companies, lawyers and the government. We are no longer doctors; we are now health care ‘providers.’” (Page 49)

“Patients walk into our office and tell us what they need based on commercials on TV. Are we happy? What do you think?” (Page 50)

“General surgery is dying. Please help!” (Page 51)

“I would never do this again and it is killing both my husband and myself.” (Page 51)

“I love being a doctor but I hate non-medical people telling me what to do.” (Page 52)



"Of all men in the profession the forty-hour-a-day man is the most to be pitied. Not always an automaton, he may sometimes by economy of words and extraordinary energy do his work well, but too often he is the one above all others who needs the refreshment of mind and recreation that is to be had in a well-conducted society." Sir William Osler

"Medicine is about patients and professionals who provide direct patient care. Both are now suffering. The physician/patient relationship has been undermined by lawyers and managed care. Their propaganda has contributed greatly to the loss of the country's soul." (Page 53)

"Hairdressers charge more than what we receive for office visits." (Page 53)

"We are drowning in a sea of regulations and paperwork." (Page 53)

"Medicine today is on life support. Imperfect people want perfect results. Despite the preventive measures and education doctors provide, the attitude is 'give me a pill and cure all my ills—but I won't stop smoking, eating or drinking to excess.'" (Page 54)

"I regret ever becoming a physician." (Page 55)

"Paperwork! Paperwork is killing us!" (Page 55)

"Patients have no respect for our profession any longer, and that's the most disheartening thing." (Page 56)

"It has become a source of regret and shame that the profession we all whole heartedly accepted to help and alleviate the pain and agony of mankind, has become a monstrous nightmare which is haunting us day and night... We are forced to exchange and replace our compassion with robotic rules." (Page 57)

"The joy of medicine has been stolen from physicians." (Page 58)

"The only good thing about the practice of medicine is the patients. But I can't afford to see patients anymore. So I'm leaving clinical practice." (Page 58)

"Rules, regulations, low pay, malpractice—it is amazing that I still practice medicine. I do so because I love my work." (Page 59)

"Malpractice has removed the joy of practicing medicine and the art of practicing medicine." (Page 60)

"You win. We're done. Now what? My advice—don't get sick." (Page 62)

"Do not treat us as criminals. The paperwork and barriers to payment assume we are cheats and liars when we are not." (Page 63)

"Everyone wants to ride the horse, but no one wants to feed the horse." (Page 65)

"In 1979, liability insurance for a surgeon was \$13,000, equivalent to 6 or 7 hernia operations. In 2007, the same insurance is \$80,000 and must be paid by performing 120 hernia operations." (Page 67)

"The private practice of general internal medicine is suffering 'death from a thousand cuts.'" (Page 68)

"The malpractice crisis and unreasonable patient expectations have sucked the joy out of practicing medicine. We are underpaid and overworked and still expected to be perfect in our judgment." (Page 69)

"I have never seen morale so low in the profession. In my specialty, general surgery, the situation is particularly dire with a decreasing number of surgeons." (Page 70)

"The profession of medicine is still great. The business is increasingly terrible...I and many of my colleagues believe that medicine has been stolen from us by insurance companies." (Page 70)

"Family Practice used to have 25% to 30% overhead and is now at 60% to 70%. Imagine the amount of work that must be produced to dent that discrepancy." (Page 71)

"The government and insurance companies are practicing medicine without a license. If people want to be doctors they should go to medical school. Medicine is an art; it cannot be bar-coded, like at Wal-Mart. We are excessively micro-managed, I resent it!" (Page 72)

"The current environment for practicing medicine is not sustainable. Most doctors just want to take good care of their patients. It's getting very hard to do that." (Page 75)

"Continue to beat us down and I won't be the last physician to quit medicine." (Page 75)

"America's physicians are overworked, underpaid, disenchanted, frustrated, tired, and harassed. Are these the people you want delivering your care?" (Page 76)



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What About Access?

"I spend as much time on documenting a patient visit as I spend with the patient." (Page 79)

"When physicians are driven out of business, who will care for the patients? The insurance companies?" (Page 80)

"I love what I do but can't continue to see my paycheck eroded and still work long hours away from my family." (Page 82)

"We are in for a catastrophic event. Less doctors, more under-served areas, more doctors going broke and retiring early and in the end more difficulty in accessing care." (Page 83)

"I still like seeing patients in the exam room but as soon as I walk out the door to the piles of paperwork I could just keep walking." (Page 84)

"Pay primary care doctors fairly or soon there will be none." (Page 84)

"I closed my private family practice in 2002 and went to work for the state as a prison doctor. I couldn't even give my practice with 8,000 active charts away. Those patients all had to find new primary care doctors in a community that has few open practices." (Page 85)

"We are on the brink of a provider revolt, doctors will quit before they take a 10% pay cut. I can happily drive a bus and live in a trailer in Florida!" (Page 87)

"If Primary Care falls, the safety net of the healthcare system falls." (Page 91)

Treatment Plans

"I would emphasize that the practice of 'intellectual medicine' is as complex and demanding as that of 'procedural medicine' and that this needs to be recognized and reimbursed appropriately." (Page 100)

"We need huge and significant tort reform ASAP." (Page 101)

"I am or have been a technician and I want to be a physician. Please let me go from technician to physician again." (Page 103)

"Stop frivolous lawsuits and huge settlements. We are not the enemy." (Page 107)

"Get rid of the large waste caused by coding." (Page 107)

"Let policy makers be doctors. You cannot swim unless you yourself are in the pool." (Page 111)

"Don't punish us for not being perfect—no one is!" (Page 116)

"If you think healthcare is expensive now, wait until it's free!" (Page 119)



"What should be done to reform healthcare is beyond the scope of this book. However, whether we adopt a single payer system, a market driven system, or retain a modified version of the current system, physicians will still be the key providers of care. Whatever system is adopted needs to address this fact and, to as great an extent as possible, allow doctors to be doctors." (Page 141)



The Osler Symposia is one small endeavor that has been created to stem the tide of physicians abandoning their chosen profession...one doctor at a time. Victor Hugo wrote, *"There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come."*

With the support of other organizations, The Osler Symposia can make a difference. The time is now.

In 1977, Wangari Maathai planted 7 trees in Kenya in honor of World Environment Day.

In 2004, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Today over 42,000,000 million trees have been planted worldwide as part of the Green Belt Movement...started by one woman.