

◆ Acceptance Address: *Puking and Mewling, Then Sitting in Slippers, Then Drooling*

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I am pleased and surprised to find myself here today. Pleased? It's obvious why. I hold CSE in high regard, so I am deeply grateful, thoroughly delighted, and greatly honored to be given this high award. And the more so when I consider the extraordinary people given this award in the past.

And surprised? A few years ago, when the annual meeting was held in Philadelphia, CBE was gracious enough to acknowledge, I'm sure with relief, my finally rotating off the board, and that evening they called my name to present me with an award for services done. Unhappily, the moment my name was called was followed by a lengthy hush, itself followed by nervous titters, followed by laughter as my fellow members of this great organization gradually realized that I hadn't just been individually rude to so many of its individual members, but now, most publicly, to the organization itself.

Now what the audience couldn't possibly know was that I had an ironclad explanation and excuse. Because at that moment I was, entirely and editorially reasonably, in a bar 10 miles away in Philadelphia, drinking entirely reasonable editorial vodka tonics with Richard Horton and Fiona Godlee. I feel that if only CSE had known that, they'd have understood.

But it's the fact that CSE didn't know, but still seem to have forgiven me, that is what's so surprising. And the fact that knowing I was getting this award, I still managed to get my act together to be here

is what I find utterly astonishing. Thank you, dear, dear CSE, for your tolerance as well as your generosity.

Lest I get a big head, I'd mention that 2 weeks ago I received a routine e-mail from my department chair at the University of California, San Francisco: "We would like to give tribute to members of our faculty who, in the past year, have been given major awards in medicine, science and teaching." Thus encouraged, even provoked, I thought I should tell him of this award, describing CSE, the award, and some of the previous recipients, finally noting that as one of these had been the National Library of Medicine, this meant I had become an institution, a comment I duly noted as being a joke (deans and chairmen tend to need help with that sort of thing). Still, I thought he'd understand, so I eagerly awaited his reply, which I expected to combine fulsome congratulations with a lengthy paeon of praise. At the very least, my efforts would be recognized. They were. When it came, the reply said simply: "Thanks."

A few years ago there was discussion in CBE about what to call this award, and, unfortunately, this somewhat ridiculous name, "Award for Meritorious Achievement", was chosen for this impressive and important award, a perfect example of the general rule that individuals, acting as members of a committee, will vote for what each of them separately would think ludicrous (the decision of the CSE Awards Committee to give me this prize is another).

Merit's a curious word. Its first meaning is "that which is deserved or has been earned, whether good or evil; due reward or *punishment*". The following quotations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* express something of the flavor this word has for me: "1879 RICE-WIGGIN & GRAVES *Elem. Sch.*

Manager "The 'merit-card' system. Under this system, a cheap coloured ticket . . . is given . . . to every scholar who has made the total number of attendances possible in the previous week. When a scholar has gained twelve of these 'merits' he receives a prize in exchange for them." This practice was modified in 1901, 22 years later, in the *Westminster Gazette*: "They refuse to give a merit-certificate to any child known to be addicted to cigarette-smoking."

The word *achievement* has the same feeling about it. The *OED* says: "Chiefly U.S. Performance in a standardized test (*achievement test*)." Now as regards this prize, I have always been more troubled by its bureaucratic connotations (the "cheap coloured ticket", the "standardized test") or the fact that *meritorious* can denote something punishable, than by its Latin origins, obvious to anyone flogged into a classics education like me: *meritorius*, meaning, and I quote from the *OED*, "that earns money (by prostitution)".

So there you have it. *That's* how I earned it.

How did I come to be standing here at this podium, with so many of my good friends here to share my good luck? Is this relevant? And am I going to tell you my life history? To these questions I'd answer: I don't know, and perhaps, and bits only.

In a sense, everyone's tales have already been told. My beloved Shakespeare wrote a one-size-fits-all biography in *As You Like It*:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely
players;
They have their exits and their
entrances,
And one man in his time plays many
parts,
His acts being seven ages. . . . At first

CSE Award for Meritorious Achievement

Acceptance Address continued

the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's
arms:
And then the whining school-boy,
with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping
like snail
Unwillingly to school. . . .

I skip the lover, the soldier, the justice or
judge (or editor), the lean and slippered
pantaloon, and end with me:

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful his-
tory,
Is second childishness, and mere
oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans
every thing.

Well before Bryan Haynes, this was put
into a structured abstract by Victor Gray:

At first there's puking and mewling
Then very pissed off with his school-
ing
Then fucks and then fights
And judging chap's rights
Then sitting in slippers, then drool-
ing.

That's me, then, but here are some
details.

I gave my first talk in the United States,
at the Washington Hilton Hotel, here in
DC in September 1966. It was on the dif-
ferential sieving of molecules of injected
hairspray, polyvinylpyrrolidone, by the
glomerular capillaries in young adults with
congenital heart abnormalities causing
severe right-to-left shunting and extreme
hypoxia—recognizable by their blue color,
cyanosis.

A byproduct of this work was my dis-
covery, when climbing in the Himalayas,
that you can tell how high a normal per-
son is—the altitude at which a normal
person is situated—simply by measuring,
exceedingly accurately, using radioactive
immunoassay and several tons of equip-
ment, the urinary microalbumin of certain
molecular size and charge. (I should, in
fairness, say that there are other even

simpler ways including the use of a map,
or even an altimeter.) I published this in
Richard Horton's journal, *The Lancet*, in
1970, at which time Richard was learning,
simultaneously, both to stand up in his play
pen and how to write incisive editorials.
The title of the manuscript I sent in, "The
Urinary Trek", I changed under pressure to
"In Nepal with the Piss Corps", but, Robin
Fox was still unsatisfied.¹ (I'm happy to say
that even then, 31 years ago, I included my
lab assistant on the byline as a coauthor.)

After that 1966 talk, I got several offers
to come to the States, and that's what I and
my wife, Silvia, and two children did the
next year. That was 35 years ago and the
year MEDLINE came into being. I came
over permanently the next year, having
accepted an offer to go to the University of
Illinois in Chicago.

Just before my move, which we did
second class aboard the SS *Michaelangelo*
from Genoa to New York, I had submit-
ted a paper to *The Lancet*. This was a case
report written entirely by me about a baby
with blackwater fever, or renal shutdown
due to malaria, whom I had looked after
in London and dialyzed successfully. I had
consulted an eminent British expert in
tropical diseases, to whom I showed the
paper but not the patient, and whose name
I had added to the paper. Several weeks
later, in Chicago, I opened *The Lancet* to
see my article there and the name of the
expert but not my name as the author.
Now you could say that I was properly
punished for adding an honorary author.
The punishment took the form of having
this senior honorary author, this guest,
this invited cuckoo, dislodging the real
author, me, the host, completely from the
byline and nudging me out of the nest. I
wrote to him in protest, and in his reply he
agreed that he knew I was in the process
of emigrating, because I'd asked him to
handle the proofs, but he complained that
I'd been difficult to get hold of when the
proofs came, so he'd had no choice.

This outrageous abuse of rank to cheat a
junior may, perhaps, have been one factor
leading later to my interest in authorship
and the crimes academics commit upon
their fellows. Ten years later, in 1977, I

became the first deputy editor of the *New
England Journal of Medicine*. It is certainly
true that I felt I was much more ready
than my colleagues to accept the possi-
bility of scientific misconduct when the
first case that intimately involved me, and
the second to cause massive international
publicity, that of Soman at Yale, occurred
at the *New England Journal of Medicine* in
1979. Indeed, my written report conclud-
ing that plagiarism had occurred during
review was delivered nearly 2 years before
Soman admitted it to the first official who
actually asked. Much later I was on the US
Commission on Research Integrity.

I then had an extraordinary piece of luck.
In my early 40s, when I was descending from
the summit of Denali, or Mount McKinley,
up in Alaska, the head of my right femur
collapsed. In one sudden moment I had to
give up all that expedition climbing and all
that low-oxygen research in which I had
established the only scientific reputation
I had. How could I take responsibility for
others in the mountains? Very suddenly I
was forced to look for another interest in
midcareer. At the time it was a disaster,
being forcibly separated from my science
and my scientific colleagues as well as
all my close climbing friends. I became
disoriented and depressed. I was saved by
editing, first at the *NEJM* for 4 years and
then at *JAMA*. And for 24 years I've had
a whole new career and a whole new set
of wonderful colleagues and exciting chal-
lenges—better yet, I have kept all my toes,
all my fingers. Best of all, unlike more than
half the people I started climbing with, I
haven't died a violent death. I'm alive!

In these 24 years, four great men showed
me the importance of having a mission in
life: Gene Garfield, who inspired—and
funded me. Then my closest friend, Leon
Lederman; then Josh Lederberg, who
showed me the ethical importance of a sci-
entific manuscript; and a friend at a time of
great trouble, Bernie Lown.

These have been some of my missions,
then, my enthusiasms:

Peer Review

Editing is all about avoiding bias. I believe

CSE Award for Meritorious Achievement

Acceptance Address continued



we must know more about the reasons for publication biases before we can remove them. For years I had to listen to editors expatiating on the virtues of peer review on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, but a great deal of self-congratulation. The Peer Review Congresses changed all that. In 1986, when I announced the first such congress to present research into peer review, there were five articles published on the subject. In 1999, there were 208. The fourth Peer Review Congress comes up in September, in Barcelona. Already I have received 180 abstracts.

There's much to change. I won't be happy until all peer review is open. Secrecy is the enemy of justice, accountability is hard with anonymity: Open review is the only ethical way.

Proper Reporting

Given that science doesn't really exist until published, and given that the editor is the first person outside the institution to see the full work, the submitted manuscript carries a high ethical load—it's a testament—so it's impossible for the principal concerns of editors not to be ethical ones. And it's no surprise to find these inextricably tied up with the practicalities of reporting science. That is why I worry so much about structure, the open and complete reporting of trials and meta-analyses (CONSORT, MOOSE, QUOROM, and now STARD), fair conduct and fair reporting of trials, publication bias, cost-effectiveness analysis, and the insidious and corrupting influence of money on our entire scientific and editing profession. This is why I think David Moher is such a hero. And it's why I am codirector, with

Lisa Bero, of the San Francisco Cochrane Center.

Innovation

Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt, as Tennyson said; or, as Vitek Tracz said yesterday, have a bias toward publication. One of the great unanswered questions about biomedical publication and the peer-review system is how much it suppresses innovation and how much better off we'd all be without a system that inevitably favors the status quo.

Accountability

Just as I know that I write better reviews when I sign them, so I see many of the evils of authorship to be associated with the increase in the number of authors per paper, and a corresponding diminution of responsibility. A strange mathematical fact of authorship is that as the number of authors increases, accountability is divided by something like 10 for each additional author, but credit is never less than 100% for everyone. Magic! Hence the obvious idea of naming the actual contributions made by each author and disclosing this important information to the reader. I and then I and Linda Emanuel and Veronica Yank worked this out. I was delighted when Richard Horton at *The Lancet* and Richard Smith at the *British Medical Journal*, both original, visionary editors, ran with this plan, and so did Frank Davidoff at the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, and Tony Proto at *Radiology*. Thank you.

Editorial Freedom

I feel passionately about this branch of academic freedom. By far the most useful thing

I ever did in my life was play a leading role in changing the governance of *JAMA* and the relation between the owner and editor at *JAMA*, introducing the editorial-oversight committee and greatly strengthening the status and powers of the editor. Cathy DeAngelis has been superb in making this work: Laws are only as good as those who keep and enforce them.

Integrity

Most important, I have for years been deeply concerned with the integrity of the entire system we live in. Not just misconduct, though for years I worked on developing a proper and useful system for responding to allegations of misconduct, part of this work being done on the Commission on Research Integrity. My concern is about something infinitely more pervasive and troubling. Clinical research is awash with money, and large amounts of money are distorting good researchers and good research. Most clinical research is done at the behest of commercial sponsors. We journals, and above all we patients, should be deeply suspicious of such vast built-in bias and such a deeply corrupting influence.

I had many motives for moving to the West Coast and the University of California, San Francisco. One of the most powerful was, of course, that I would never have to wear a suit or tie again. And except for 2 days a month, when at *JAMA*, I have managed to sustain that blissful state. So it is right here, right now. And though this is CSE's Oscar, I am realistic enough to know that there aren't tens of millions of women glued to their TVs, checking out my gown.

CSE Award for Meritorious Achievement

Acceptance Address continued

However, I wouldn't be standing here were it not for all my many friends, my mentors, like John Bailar, and my youngers and betters. Now at the Oscars, they are thanked in the verbal equivalent of a TV drug ad's streaming list of toxic effects. What to do, given that they are the only reason I have been able to achieve anything in this second, wonderful life of mine? It would be invidious to thank all those who have inspired me and those I have merely followed, but Meritorious Achievement Time is time to be invidious.

At *JAMA*, George Lundberg allowed me free rein—2000 miles is the perfect distance for me to be away from my boss. And now it's Cathy DeAngelis, and my tamer and handler, Phil Fontanarosa, a truly wonderful man, to whom I am grateful. Above all, Annette Flanagin, without whom, over the years, nothing. There are all sorts of great figures from the past: Franz Ingelfinger who showed me that editing

was really exciting, Ed Huth, Stephen Lock, all of whom won this award; Bud Relman, who showed me how to craft an argument. My dear scientific and editorial colleagues, Elizabeth Knoll, Lisa Bero, Taddy Dickersin, Mildred Cho, Susan Eastwood, Roy Pitkin, Mike Callahan, Sir Iain Chalmers, Steve Hulley, Ken Rothman, Fiona Godlee. What stars! What examples! What friends! The two Richards, my two dear friends, Richard Smith and Richard Horton, both geniuses in their very different ways, who have constantly stimulated and encouraged me. I am totally in their debt. My assistants Alison Galbraith (Hal Sox's new daughter in law), Veronica Yank, and finally Ryo Shohara. Then my dear wife Deb!

Finally, I thank mountaineering. I have been on scores of expeditions all over the planet, and this useless, self-indulgent activity is the most powerful metaphor for everything in life, especially *trust*—the

metaphor there being the rope. I can't imagine life without mountains, and my climbing friends, dead and alive.

I have already published my obituary,² and if you want to know more, look it up. Meanwhile, before I get back to Oregon and to sitting in slippers, and drooling, let me remind you to be at the Authorship Retreat this afternoon and, above all, be in Barcelona in mid-September. Until then, thank you, CSE, thank you! 🍷

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