

Welcome/Thanks to TTC, Nat Cap, and Andy/Michele, Mark, and Chris/ Overview of the Courage Recipients

This is the first day of Spring, it's a time for new beginnings, a time for our first gala to be shared with many special people. Yet even as we celebrate the hope and promise of a brighter future for those suffering from Lyme disease, we are reminded of the harsh realities and obstacles yet to be overcome.

For example, we received news earlier this week that our friend Dr. Charles Ray Jones, who you just viewed in the film, has been dragged into court again today, in the latest of a series of interminable medical board hearings in CT. We pray for him and wish him well. And we are outraged by how this great man has been persecuted for almost 3 years. Dr. Jones and I have a running joke about how we'll spend our time together in prison, and who will get the top bunk. I will but he used to wrestle....so maybe not. It's testament to his spirit and character that he's able to laugh about the abuses and persecutions he has suffered.

Dr. Jones is a man who has long understood his role in medicine and the profound nature of his gifts, not only his gift to restore health to thousands of children when no other would, but also his gift to everyone, which he gives unconditionally and which is embodied in his suffering on our behalf and has already forgiven those who have attacked him so ruthlessly.

As portrayed in the movie we've just seen, the delay in recognizing our nation's Lyme epidemic presents a prime example of our broken health care system. *The way in which a society deals with a marginalized population is the signature and indelible stamp of that society's character ... give the US health system an F grade for its work here.*

Victims of Lyme disease are trapped twice by their illness; first by the unending suffering attached with the illness, and second by a health care system that ignores them, and just doesn't ignore them, but ridicules them.the undeserved arrogance of the medical profession; the arrogance of the healthy.

What is happening to the Lyme nation is similar to what I witnessed at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. There was complacency for 'that gay disease' until finally, by virtue of the size and horror of the epidemic, AIDS became a personal reality to more and more Americans as their own families became touched by the epidemic; the same is happening with Lyme disease.

Who is happy with US health care? Not the patients, not the doctors..... who benefits from our current system? We all know the answer.

With AIDS and now with Lyme disease, why does the American health care system need a sledgehammer to the temple to wake up? How much suffering and death has to happen? We all agree that there is nothing more important in life than good health, and it's simply criminal to squander health that is lost to a treatable illness. We have at risk, the unimaginable: A great nation crippled by an epidemic that has the capability of slowly bringing our country to its knees.

According to the National Coalition on Health Care, we have reached the point where the public's main domestic concerns – the economy, jobs and health care – are really one and the same issue. *Arrogance and greed, arrogance and indifference, arrogance and ignorance, the same issues which played key roles in our economic chaos today are also factors in the decline in the quality of American health care..... Humility, honesty, and hard work are the antidotes....*

A student of history could have forecast the current economic catastrophe fueled by these predictable human failings, and some did..... And Dr. William Osler, the Father of American medicine out of Johns Hopkins University, would have forecast colossal peril for the great culture of American medicine upon learning its condition had been entrusted, or more accurately stated, wrested away by businessmen and lawyers in the corporatization of health care.

I expect the US to regain its economic vibrancy once the banks and financial markets are stabilized, and once these markets demonstrate to the American people the type of progress needed to restore confidence.

The same signs of progress are needed to restore confidence in our country's health care

The only way to begin restoring that confidence is by admitting there is a problem and when those in power suppress and alter information about an emerging tsunami, then failing your duty should have the appropriate consequences. Humility, honesty, and hard work are needed to fix the issues.

Where our national health and the health of our children are concerned, the American public deserves the truth – not fluff and excuses – from the CDC and the from the N.C. Division of Public Health, both now playing catch-up for what appears to be their deliberative manipulation and suppression of facts having to do with the Lyme epidemic ... I excuse Dr.

Leagh Devlin, recently resigned director of the NCPHD, but the rest of you are busted... And let's not overlook a small number of infectious disease physicians who have brought disgrace to their fine organization – the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and who exacerbate this disgrace every time they open their collective mouths. They are a huge embarrassment to their society and to the medical profession generally.

Experts agree that the US health care system is riddled with inefficiencies, excessive administrative costs, inflated prices, poor management, inappropriate care, waste, and fraud..... Not my words, folks.....this comes from people who study this stuff every day.

The McKinsey Global Institute 2007 report states that the US health care system has \$480 Billion in annual excess spending compared to Western European counterparts, and spends six times as much for administrative costs.

A recent article in the Raleigh News & Observer suggests that Blue Cross/Blue Shield North Carolina is charging the state up to 18 times for administration costs than what they charge to administrate the state's Medicaid program.

Private health insurance was never intended to wield the sort of power that we see in today's health marketplace – and nowhere is it more pervasive than within the diagnosis and treatment of chronic Lyme disease. Health care companies are essentially nothing more than 'bean counters' and collection agents who have taken occupation of our health care system. They hold on to 'way too many beans' and do it by practicing medicine without a medical license and making it pay. They do it through avoidance of accountability, inadequate oversight, through 'cooking their books' and through their overwhelming financial influence, including, importantly, major political influence on our legislators. Trillions of dollars in various reserve accounts. Look at NC state senate.....guaranteed non-competitive status for BCBSNC....later repealed..... that's wrong.

In order to ensure their grip on health care issues, private insurers no longer serve their original mission as liaison between provider and patient. Rather, they have become brutally intrusive in the physician-patient relationship, rigidly controlling health care decisions on every level – a practice so pervasive and so accepted today that whether medical services are available depends on 'what insurance says'.....

And they tightly control who they will insure through profiling applicants..... If you have Lyme disease in NC, and there are questions on the health application questionnaire about this, you will be quoted an annual premium of around \$4-5K..... This is a lie. The premium

will exceed \$20K and/or be attached with outrageous riders that make it unaffordable and unworkable....in a state where “Lyme disease doesn’t exist”.

The ability to ‘practice medicine’ as both an art and science, to devote adequate time to understanding complex medical issues, *and to therefore individualize care has been hijacked by the corporatization of medicine imposed by health insurance, hospitals, and other bureaucratic entanglements.....in the illness for profit model.* In our dysfunctional system, paradigms in health care don’t change until it becomes in the best interest of the people running health care to make change.....and that has little to do with the evolution of the science and art of medicine for the patient’s benefit, but it does have to do with the bottom line.

This must change – . Physicians and patients must take back their health care system and kick out the parasites and predators. Through events like tonight and the passion and dedication of people like you; change it will.

The physicians who are looked at for academic guidance, the so-called academic medical gurus, have arguably degenerated worse than any other group in medicine, and yet they hold the most influence.....at least for now, certainly true if ‘expert medical testimony’ for insurance companies is needed.

Hundreds of my patients have been ridiculed and humiliated on visits to these ‘medical centers’. And so, it seems, many of the medical faculty have completely lost touch with patient care –and many have completely forgotten that the source of all learning, and ultimately all positive change in the practice of medicine, originates from spending real time with the patient. After all, what is the point of medical research if it doesn’t translate to patient care on some level?

It starts with listening to what the patient says, listening always, and repeating this process frequently, because that is where learning happens. No one ever learned anything by talking.

Those who write the medical gospel of the day talk often and seldom listen. Most consider themselves beyond reproach. They want to be known as the ‘top chefs’ of their profession, but cracking eggs or peeling potatoes is beneath them now – regularly re-immersing themselves in their patients’ stories is not worth their time or they never learned how to do it in the first place.

According to the CDC, the prevalence of chronic illness is booming in our country, and despite all of our academic advancements and the billions of dollars poured into health care, we remain grossly ignorant about what is making us sick.

Of the top twenty (20) chronic illnesses in the US, the medical societies of all recognized subspecialties have designated an etiology, or cause, for only two ... two. Notably they are HIV/AIDS, and Helicobacter pylori infection, associated with chronic gastritis.

A short list of chronic illnesses for which there is no known cause includes Rheumatoid and degenerative forms of arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis, Crohn's Disease, various types of heart disease, diabetes, Autism, Alzheimer's, ALS, Parkinson's disease, and many forms of cancer.

I have noticed that my patients with chronic Lyme disease have far too many of these co-morbid illnesses. Could it be that some of our society's chronic illnesses are caused by or triggered by a conglomeration of cryptic infections, and their consequences on the immunologic control of our health?

Immunologic collapse was certainly the case in the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as patients withered from the relentless immune destroying HIV infection, permitting opportunistic infections living in all of us to overwhelm weakened immune systems. To put it another way, we all harbor the microorganisms that killed over one thousand of my HIV/AIDS patients over the past 20 years.

When medicine finally changes its approach to chronic illness, when the corporate paradigm of 'patch and pay' is dispatched, I predict the study of medicine will evolve into a discipline that interlaces genomic profiling with an improved understanding of the makeup and interactions of the 500 trillion microorganisms living in each of us, and how the complex interactions promote health or illness. It is possible and ironic that the Lyme Borreliosis Complex epidemic finally forces policy makers to look at chronic illness differently. This is my prediction of the future; but what I do know right now is that the human condition is forever changed by the Lyme epidemic, that millions are living lives of quiet desperation in an uncaring health care system, and that we are wasting time playing in the political sand box.

To those medical researchers working on understanding the chronic conditions that I have mentioned, you have my deep respect and support. However, our 'patch-and-pay' corporate driven health care environment does little to promote and prioritize vigorous activity into the causes of many chronic illnesses, including Lyme disease.

As time does not permit, I will briefly describe a concept that I have to help restore the mission and integrity of the medical profession, and focus on improved health care delivery and access for all. It short, it commits the best in medicine to become actively involved in all the disciplines that constitute health care delivery and for there to be reciprocation from representatives in fields such as public health, hospital administration, government agencies, insurance, and so on. It's the only sensible way to work for the patient and it means significantly changing the corporate emphasis in medicine; it will involve walking in the other person's footsteps, and it could work.

The relationship of the patient and the physician will persevere in spite of all; it is an intimate, profoundly human, and profoundly beautiful connection that has been forged over the millennia. It involves profound trust on the part of those who seek medical care; it requires commitment and integrity for those fortunate enough selected to serve. Our medical profession is not doing its part to maintain and strengthen this bond; that is what is at stake. This sacred relationship is under fire from the withering attack by the barbarians of the time, but this bond cannot die. We cannot and will not allow it. The patient/doctor bond will supersede all; to have otherwise happen is an unthinkable tragedy for all who value health and wellness.....

People often ask why I do this..... first of all, I'm not good at anything else, but more importantly, I love medicine and I feel so privileged to have a place in history in which I have been given the opportunity to be of real help to my patients. If you love medicine, believe me, it doesn't get any better than this....

My own journey to that end would not have been possible without the immeasurable support and love of my wife, Kay, who has remained steadfast and strong through a maelstrom of slings and arrows, who has struggled with the emotional strain of our ordeal of the past 3 years at the hands of people who have had their own agenda on how to deal with Lyme disease and who would have my family and me extinguished.....

Kay will probably kill me for this; in fact, specifically asked that I don't do what I'm about to do. But I'm going to do it anyway. Kay, come on up here.

And then you speak from the heart, flowers come out, kids come out, wild applause and tears. And you all step aside, but remain on stage, and turn it back over to Jordan.

