

Who, Why and How

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First I want to thank my family and friends, especially my co-workers. They will sacrifice a lot over this next year. I especially would like to thank my husband, Ken Kelly. Without your love and support I could never do this. I love you. You all know me... I would never be married to me!

I am very much aware of the fact we are near the end of this evening's formal program, so I will try to speak from my heart and make my comments as brief as possible.

It was very difficult for me to write this speech. The last time I had to write a speech for a large audience was 25 years ago at my commencement from Georgetown Medical School. Since then, my speeches have been to smaller audiences and usually more personal. You see, I seem to have fallen into the role of eulogist. Just ask Dr. Troise. Several years ago she received the award for the Rhode Island Medical Women's Association Physician of the Year, and I gave the introduction. Afterwards several women I never met suggested when the time came I might be called upon to give their eulogies.

So my main goal tonight is not to bury this speech. I think I can best pull it off by addressing the WHO, the WHY and the HOW.

WHO

I am Diane Siedlecki, the oldest of 5 children. My father affectionately refers to me as to the fifth from the bottom. I am from my paternal grandfather, Teofil Siedlecki, originally from Poland, a butcher, who taught me love for his country, this country, and who lived a quiet pious life, loyal to faith and family.

I am from Julia Herkert, my maternal grandmother who raised 13 children, 9 to adulthood after her husband left her widowed at age 40. She taught me what it takes to survive, to do what was needed to get the job done and to NEVER, EVER quit.

I am from Mary Herkert Siedlecki my mom, who passed away almost 10 years ago. She could have been CEO of any company but instead chose to be CEO of our home. From her I learned the art of conversation, to ask, to listen and hold the world close to my heart. From her I learned unconditional love.

I am from Eugene Siedlecki, my papa who is here this evening. From him I learned the importance of getting the job done. He was an insurance agent who took part in several class action suits against his parent company. He taught me that when it came to principles, no matter what you perceive the cost to be, it will cost you more in time, money and honor if you settle for less than the right thing.

The WHY

Why am I here? Simple. I'm here because I was asked. Around eight years ago I got call from Dr. Yul Ejnes, a Past President of the Rhode Island Medical Society. He asked me if I would be willing to serve as Secretary of the Medical Society. I told him I do not do minutes. They would be waiting for them for ever. He said you do not need to do minutes; someone else does that. I asked him did he call me because he needed a woman on the Council, and I was a middle-aged woman with no children at home. He said yes, and I said ok. It was as simple as that.

I came to the table because I was asked.

What we need to accomplish is enormous. We need to step in and save our profession. I am here because 25 years ago I graduated

medical school. I still could not believe that I was blessed to be part of the profession I thought I would only be able to dream about. I was excited about everything. The opportunities and options seemed endless. I felt part of a great profession, charged up and in charge.

Somewhere along those 25 years so many things have changed. It was no longer a profession I recognized. It became very difficult for me to be able to look a young person in the eye and say choose medicine. It was hard for me to say to a medical student choose primary care – even when I still believe I have the best job in the world. I am doing this because I am an Internist, a primary care provider and, let's face it, we are on the extinction list.

Primary care / psychiatry is the elephant in the room we need to acknowledge. Over the years we have slowly created two classes of physicians, the primary care docs and psychiatrists on one hand and then the rest on the other. No blame. Much of this has been due to the advances in technology, and much of it also has been secondary to the shrinking health care dollar that needs to be split in ever smaller proportions. We are...no, we were an easy target. But that can no longer be. If we do not fix this disparity it will become more difficult for the specialists to do their job, because they will be doing our job. And we know that they do not want to be doing that.

HOW

And that leads me to the how. The how is simple. We do it together. I am going to steal a line from a tribute piece that Dr. Ken Mayer wrote for the late Dr. Al Fischer. He quoted an old sage, Rabbi Hillel, who said "he who saves a single life has saved a universe." We have been given the honor to practice medicine, and in essence each one of us has been blessed with the saving of a life. It could have been as dramatic as surgery, a discovery, a correct diagnosis, or as simple as a word, a touch, a connection. In doing such things, we have saved our own lives.

I believe part of the "how" we will do this is to remind ourselves of our ultimate task, and this is taken directly from our website: "to support physicians in their efforts to serve their patients, succeed in their medical practices and in other ways realize their professional potential and achieve their personal goals."

I believe in the "how" of doing this by reaching out and getting the younger generation involved. Not by expecting them to join, but by asking them specifically to join and to be involved in a committee, to represent RIMS to the legislature, to hand out bike helmets to the RiTeCare kids. By asking them individually, directly, one by one, to join, to attend, to represent, to take part in their future. Their future should not be solely represented or molded by us. Because I will not accept that the "whatever" generation is really not interested. I will not accept that the youth of today will embrace mediocrity and thus change the face of medicine from a calling, from a profession, to a job.

And given the choice, I choose passion, always. I leave you with a quote, this time from a new sage. She is my niece Laura, who turned 14 today. She actually wrote this when she was 12. It is the last two lines of a poem she wrote.

*Don't march to the beat of my drummer,
for the song bird sings his own song.
Don't wait for inspiration,
for you could simply be your very own.*

Let us work together toward an inspiring and productive year. ❖