



It makes you think...



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Would you take your car to a mechanic who has not learned how an internal combustion engine is constructed or what its parts are? Or if that mechanic was not aware what fuel would best suit your vehicle and why? Or if he had no idea how the power is transmitted from the pistons to the tailshaft?

There is an increasing number of graduates from medical schools in Australia and overseas who have scant knowledge of human anatomy or biochemistry. Recently a GP registrar, when shown a diagram of the conversion of cholesterol to hormones, admitted that he had never seen such a diagram. Yet this doctor was happy to prescribe cholesterol-lowering drugs, not aware that this would have an impact on hormone production.

A medical student at University of Melbourne has told me that much of the learning now is through students 'researching' – finding information for themselves, but without really knowing what they are looking for nor its relevance to their ultimate goals of becoming doctors.

What is happening in our medical schools?

The term 'doctor' means teacher; doctors should not be merely applying bandages and mending bones – they should be teaching people how to look after themselves, how to prevent illness from occurring and what changes to make in their lifestyles to be healthier. How can a medical practitioner teach a patient anything if that practitioner does not understand the most basic structure and function of the human body? Has the production of practitioners been reduced to churning out people who can no longer think for themselves, and no longer need to because every symptom has a pharmaceutical 'cure'?

The truism that, because of the Internet, many patients know more than their doctors, may be turning into reality.

If a patient points to his lower back and says it hurts there, will the doctor know whether the pain is likely to be associated with the kidneys or is a problem around the sacroiliac joint? Is discomfort in the right side of the belly a problem with the liver or the appendix? Why would a problem in the gut reduce the absorption of zinc and why would this cause a reduction in the production of stomach acid?

Answering these and thousands of other questions which a doctor will have to deal with in the course of practice, requires a good knowledge of how the human body is put together and what makes it function optimally. Maybe medicine is going in the same direction as the 'repair' of electronic devices: if it ceases to function properly, pull out a complete part and replace it. It is becoming harder to find someone who can identify the small component responsible for the fuzzy image on my TV and replace it with the skillful application of a soldering iron.

We now routinely see replacement of hearts, lungs, livers, kidneys and more. There is experimentation with replacing wombs. How replaceable are you?

While such medicine 'saves' lives (actually extends lives), what is the cost to us as individuals and to society? Why is there not more effort going into teaching people how to avoid these interventions? This would be true doctoring and for this doctors need to know what they are doing. Teach them about the building blocks!

