

The Clinical Detective

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And so it starts again! The cycle continues—as it has done for years. Thousands of 4th yr medical students are graduating this month. They have gone through medical school and acquired extensive medical knowledge. They have studied hard, worked equally hard and observed other physicians and residents in their chosen fields. Now it is their chance to practice medicine.

As part of their training, they have been required to master core medical competencies-patient care (including clinical reasoning), medical knowledge, practice-based learning (including information management), interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and systems-based practice (including health economics and teamwork).

They are now bonafide physicians. They will now move to various residency programs in search of their dreams and to fulfill their hopes and aspirations. As they do so, they will need to integrate and master all the core medical competencies in order to become independently competent practicing physicians and clinicians.

As a result, most practicing physicians are now specialty trained doctors (who have mastered the 6 core medical competencies) with clinical skills and judgment and technical skills. They also have to be

good at documentation and record keeping—of primary importance for billing and compliance.

What differentiates an excellent physician from a good physician is the degree of clinical judgment and skill acquired through lifelong learning. This is especially important in pediatrics. Our patients vary widely in ages and developmental achievements. History is obtained second hand or even third hand by parents or caregivers. Clinical assessment and judgment becomes of critical importance as one tries to piece together all the information and clues from a clinical encounter to form a valid assessment. Once the diagnosis is reached, the actual hard work begins as one tries to convey this to the parent/caregiver and obtain their willing co-operation for the optimal and effective treatment plan for the patient. The excellent physician tries to form a therapeutic alliance with the parent/caregiver conveying the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis with empathy, sensitivity and culturally appropriate.

I would urge all my fellow physicians and residents to master all the core medical competencies with special emphasis on clinical judgment and skill. This is what will distinguish them from ordinary physicians to great clinicians and will enhance their therapeutic abilities.

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