From the President

These Are the Times That Try Physicians’ Souls

Jenny Powell, M.D.

On Oct 2, 2021, I became president of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons. It is quite an honor for me, as I have many pairs of big shoes to fill.

While it seems an unlikely course of events that this honor and task would fall to me, we’ve seen some strange things happen lately. Shakespeare wrote in The Tempest in 1610, “Alas, the storm is come again! My best way is to creep under his gaberdine; there is no other shelter hereabouts: misery acquaints a man with strange bed-fellows.” Perhaps it is the storm that approaches and swirls about us, and Liberty herself that throws AAPS into the position where this most unlikely of humans would be at its lead.

I had the great blessing of being born and raised in central Illinois; thus, it is NOT a “grilled cheese sandwich,” but a “cheese toastie.” When visiting my sister in the state’s capital city, I still want to find the best horseshoe sandwich in all of Springfield, Illinois. Like a good girl, I attended the University of Illinois in Urbana, where the undergraduate library was built underground so that no shadows would be cast over Morrow Plots, the oldest experimental corn field in the U.S. By thy rivers gently flowing, Illinois, Illinois. It was where I was married, where my children were born and educated, where I attended medical school and residency, and where I served my first four years as a family physician.

Then my husband and I made the best decision of our lives when, in 2006, we moved to the great State of Missouri. Even better, we moved into the heart of the Missouri Ozarks. Once when my sister and I took the Southwest Chief, the Amtrak train that runs between Chicago and Los Angeles, upon learning where I lived and owned a stamp-sized amount of acreage, our sleeping-car attendant declared to me, “You are rich!” If you’ve ever had the opportunity to visit the Ozarks, you may understand her sentiment.

But Missouri is not called the “Show Me State” for nothing. While we may be nearly last in the nation to get the latest styles and fads and the latest technology, there are many aspects that make me glad to live here. We were the last in the nation to adopt a PDMP (Prescription Drug Monitoring Program). While it seems an unlikely course of events that this honor and task would fall to me, we’ve seen some strange things happen lately. Shakespeare wrote in The Tempest in 1610, “Alas, the storm is come again! My best way is to creep under his gaberdine; there is no other shelter hereabouts: misery acquaints a man with strange bed-fellows.” Perhaps it is the storm that approaches and swirls about us, and Liberty herself that throws AAPS into the position where this most unlikely of humans would be at its lead.

As our souls were tried then, so are physicians’ souls tried now. Physicians who take their Hippocratic Oath seriously know how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

In that December of the year of our declared independence from monarchy, things were not going well for our fledging confederation of states. We were fighting a formidable enemy with the world’s largest navy, and a superior army that outnumbered and outgunned ours. We also had enemies within, British monarchy loyalists who worked against us at every turn.

As our souls were tried then, so are physicians’ souls tried now. Physicians who take their Hippocratic Oath seriously must now search through piles of junk to find good studies, good information, that which has not been colored by political or financial gains. They must look to old therapies, ancient treatments, and what we have on hand, that which is provided to us by Providence.
Tyranny, like hell, whether from the hand of federal, state, or local governmental agencies, hospital administration, or propagandists, is not easily conquered. In the same year Thomas Paine was writing his words, Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

There has never been a more important time for like-minded physicians, nurses, and other medical caregivers to "hang together." We Hippocratic physicians face an equally formidable enemy as the American colonists faced. The conflict will be hard, and is only just starting. We risk being marginalized. We risk loss of income and security. We may risk censorship, and even licensure discipline. Yet we cannot afford to stand quietly by as our great field of medical science and art is choking on lies, manipulation, and propaganda. On our side is the consolation that the harder we fight, the more glorious is our triumph. We will triumph. Because failure is not an option.

Winston Churchill once gave a beautiful speech, wherein he urged his countrymen: "Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy." The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

What we obtain too cheap—from the "easy A" to free medical care—we esteem too lightly. Unless we give of ourselves, unless something requires time, effort, hard-earned income, or something we worked hard to produce, we find it empty and unrewarding. While I might refer to the wall in my office where hang my diplomas, certificates, and licenses as "the wall of shame," I hang them there because they were not cheaply obtained. Churchill might have said they represent my blood, toil, tears, and sweat, so I only jest when I downplay what that wall displays. It is dearness only that gives everything its value.

The freedom to counsel, treat, and prescribe to my patient is threatened by the enemy. The freedom to travel, to enter a place of worship or commerce, to visit my loved ones is challenged by ignorance and blind subservience to a false authority. The Author of our very lives bestows the rights of life, liberty, and personal property; Heaven knows how to put a proper price on its goods. And it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

The Association of American Physicians and Surgeons is the only physician organization to stand, like the lone man before the tank in Tiananmen Square, fighting back against tyranny, fighting against a tyrannical system that would tell every physician how they may diagnose and treat, with what they may treat, whom they may treat, and that if they resist, they will be silenced and emasculated.

AAPS has stepped up, through the expert counsel of Andy Schlafly, through the support of Dr. Larry Huntoon's expertise in sham peer review, through the excellent writings of our executive director Dr. Jane Orient, through the meticulous research of our business office manager Jeremy Snavely. AAPS past presidents such as Dr. Marilyn Singleton continue to write excellent commentaries, and Dr. Craig Wax has stretched his neck out via radio. At our Annual Meeting you have heard from excellent teachers and speakers, who want to help you fight the good fight, who want you to take home information and use it, to better help your patients.

This is what AAPS is all about—your patients. Our patients. "All for the Patient" is not just a slogan, something that fits on a T-shirt (though it is a great motto, and it does fit on a T-shirt). Everything always comes back to the question: how does this better me to better serve my patient?

Originally, I wanted to give this Annual Meeting the theme of Les Misérables. But I think Atlas Shrugged may have been a better idea. Who is 24601? Or, better yet, Who is John Galt?

As one voice, we should reply, WE ARE.

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