

## INTRODUCTION

This book is for physicians, residents, interns, and medical students alike. It is for everyone involved in the practice of medicine, and anyone who each day faces the satisfactions, challenges, and frustrations that are an integral part of the modern healthcare system.

While medicine has always been one of the most rewarding of professions, being a doctor today is in many ways far more difficult than at any time in history. We know more about the causes of disease, and we have a powerful and growing arsenal of drugs and other treatments that have improved the human condition to a degree that could scarcely have been imagined just a few decades ago. Yet, many of us are dissatisfied, and a growing number of healthcare professionals are giving up and quitting long before the traditional age of retirement. The reasons given are many. Rising malpractice rates and increasingly heavy-handed managed care companies are common examples. However, those are just the most obvious challenges to a successful practice.

I believe that the greatest threat to our well-being as physicians can be found within each of us. Malpractice rates and uncooperative patients are just external challenges that can be overcome – or at least mitigated. The hardest problem to solve is a negative mindset and attitude, and it is here that we must focus our attention if we want to change our situations and give our lives new meaning.

When you finished residency and made the jump to private practice physician, you were suddenly faced with challenges on a daily basis. No matter how good your training, in that first year you were faced with situations and conditions that you likely had never dealt with before. In those days, I talked to friends in the same position and everyone said the same thing: “This is so scary, I can’t believe it.”

As you make the transition into private practice, you’re working as hard as you can to learn as much as possible, and there’s no time or inclination to yearn for anything more. You’re not thinking about taking a vacation or starting a family or any of the other human activities that most people devote at least a part of their waking hours to. You’re just concentrating on surviving, taking care of your

patients, not making a mistake, and doing the best job you can as you learn and grow as a physician.

After a year or two of practice, things begin to change. You've seen nearly everything and you've done just as much. And if you haven't seen it or done it, there's no anxiety because you've already been through the phase of not knowing what you should or shouldn't know.

Today, when I'm presented with a condition that I may have only seen once or that requires a procedure that I may not be familiar with, I can refer that patient to a colleague for a second opinion. I already have a busy practice and the referring physician isn't going to lose any respect for me because I admitted my own limitations.

Eventually, you settle into a routine. You still go to meetings and read journal articles and learn new things, but in terms of the patients who will present in your office, you've really reached a plateau of confidence. Of course, you'll continue to get better, but you now begin to feel that you've truly mastered the day-to-day challenges of private practice.

By now, nearly all situations have become familiar, and much of what you do each day becomes almost rote. It is here that the problem begins, and many of us harbor a secret that we hide from our patients and sometimes even from ourselves. While few will admit it, we become bored with the daily procession of patients and the seemingly unending repetition of complaints that sometimes have little to do with the diagnosis and treatment that we will ultimately render. Yet we must not interrupt this litany for fear of undermining the doctor/patient relationship.

Encouraging patients to speak their minds about their chief complaint in their own words is part of good doctoring. In my own practice, I spend more time listening than many doctors have either the time or the inclination to. I recognized long ago that time invested in this process created a more satisfied, cooperative, and compliant patient. But I also recognized that much of what I heard had little bearing on the treatment I would prescribe, and everything I needed to know could have been obtained in five minutes or less of asking the right questions.

One of the unavoidable truths about the practice of medicine is that unlike many other professionals, the physician can't leverage his knowledge and experience to change the way he works. Whereas an attorney, as he gains experience and seniority, can become choosy about the cases he takes on and delegate mundane research to junior partners, a practicing physician can't. Twenty years after beginning private practice, he is still seeing the same patients and performing the same duties. While you can select your medical specialty, you really can't choose which patients walk in your door or decide to see only the truly interesting cases – particularly if you're in a referral-based practice.

This situation has been complicated by the fact that in the eyes of many patients, medicine has become a commodity. The bond between provider and patient has been eroded by managed care plans and closed networks that dictate where and from whom patients may seek care. A patient may see a particular physician for many years, but the moment he or she is no longer part of the network, then the patient goes to someone who is on the approved list so that he can maintain coverage.

All of these factors have created an environment in which physicians can become complacent, and sometimes even bitter and stale. Years of practice filled with constant frustration squeeze the joy and life out of what is truly an exciting and privileged profession.

I had a taste of these feelings early in my own career and realized that unless I found a way to take back control of my life and practice, I would soon become one of those doctors who dreamed of getting out of medicine. For me, the answer lay in putting creativity and innovation at the heart of my work.

Within these pages you will find a blueprint for achievement that will expand your mind, increase your knowledge, enhance your productivity, and put you on the road to becoming a creative innovator in every aspect of your life and practice. By following the process outlined in these pages you will embark upon a path that will lead you to renewal in every aspect of your life.

When I set out to write this book, I wanted to give my medical colleagues a resource for enhancing life and practice that had never before existed. Drawing upon my own experiences as a physician in private practice and an inventor of medical devices, I developed a simple and easy-to-follow plan for enhancing creativity and putting innovation into action. In these pages you'll discover a process for looking at the way you work and finding better, more effective, more life affirming ways of doing things.

By following the Five Step Process of Creativity, you will learn to recognize problems and find innovative solutions for them. For many of you, this will mean transforming your practice and the way you serve your patients, and that will be enough. On the other hand, you may want to make one of the creative paths profiled in Section III your own. In that section you'll meet researchers and entrepreneurs, along with poets, filmmakers, and even clowns who have found new ways of advancing the cause of medicine and their own creative desires.

For some, nurturing the creative spark will lead you to turn your ideas into products and services that will benefit our profession and, ultimately, humanity as well. For you I've developed – based upon my own journey – a guide in Section IV to becoming a successful inventor of medical devices. These chapters will show you how others have turned their ideas into tangible products, sometimes even creating entire companies based on them.

To inspire you still further, in Section V you'll find profiles of some of the most prolific and groundbreaking inventors in the medical field. While each one has a unique story, they all share one very common and very essential trait – each one kept going and, despite obstacles, achieved their goals. By sharing the descriptions of some of the great innovators who have moved forward and realized their dreams, you can see the greater truth of possibility. Along with the insight you'll gain from their experiences, you'll also find the steps you need to spark your own creativity, as well as the business know-how you need to make your ideas a tangible reality. You can join them, and perhaps some day a book on inventors will feature your story as well.

If you're the type of person who has ever been just a bit different in your thinking, then this is the book you've been waiting for. It's intended for those who challenge the status quo regarding their life and profession. It provides a solution for those who might be frustrated by the way things are and have asked the question, "Why does it have to be that way?"

While this is an exploration of creativity in medicine, it is also much more. It is a start – not a finish. It will set you on a journey where each accomplishment will prompt you to keep going to find answers to questions you never thought to ask, as well as solutions to problems you may never have considered before.

While this book is based on scientific research into the creative process, it is nevertheless practical in its approach. As a fellow professional, I know that your time is valuable and that results are what count. Its success is not in whether you buy it, read it, and put it on the shelf, but in whether you use the tools within its pages to become a creative innovator filled with a new sense of passion and accomplishment.

In writing it, I wanted to offer you – the medical doctor – a guide to making creativity and innovation an integral part of your life and practice. It does that by offering you an understanding of what creativity really is and how it works.

## **The Meaning of Creativity**

Perhaps the best place to begin is by defining this elusive and little understood process. Researchers Michael Mumford and Sigrid Gustafson have laid out several means of describing it. The first consists of the production of ideas. It also involves "the recognition of possibilities" as well as the development of "a form of problem solving ability."

The authors go on to point out that creativity is also reflected in the external recognition of professional achievement, publications and patent awards, along with the judgments of knowledgeable peers or supervisors.

All of this evidence of creativity's manifestations points to the real results that we and the rest of society cherish: "novel, socially-valued products." I believe this is

the best way for us to look at creativity, because it allows us to see, measure, and judge its worth in very concrete terms.

This definition is also broad enough to encompass all the many variations of creativity and innovation that we will experience at different times and places in our lives as medical practitioners. Creativity is sometimes about developing a new medical device – as I will show you in the chapters on my own creative journey – and it is about changing the way you do things in your office, which I will also explain. It can be about finding new and more innovative forms of practice.

Patch Adams, the real life inspiration for the doctor played by Robin Williams in the movie of the same name, has spent the past several decades trying to create an environment in which the medical field treats not just the individual, but also the family and community as well. His vision is one in which no money changes hands and doctors don't carry malpractice insurance because they're given the right to make mistakes.

For most doctors, Adams' model may seem extreme and unworkable, but there are many other variations. A number of doctors have opened boutique practices that seek to get back to the older idea of a closer and more intimate relationship with patients. These doctors don't take insurance and they may charge more than most, but patients are guaranteed the ability to see the doctor in a timely manner during an appointment that isn't rushed. In all of these forms, creativity is the process you use to find solutions to the frustrations and problems you face.

I also believe that practicing creativity and innovation isn't about just making your own life better and more productive – although that is certainly a worthy and important goal. The true objective is to become the kind of person who is willing and able to change the profession in ways that benefit not only doctors, but also patients and everyone else who has a stake in our nation's healthcare system.

On a global level, tapping into our creativity in a dedicated and thoughtful manner gives us the opportunity to begin to solve some of society's most intractable problems. At the very least, it allows us to ask the right questions, and that is perhaps the most important step of all.

In the chapters to come, I'll show you what it means to be creative and I'll give you the tools to begin formulating new ideas that will address the problems you encounter. You will be able to take it from there.

In my years of education, I always found that the greatest teachers were those who didn't seek to simply fill my head with mere facts. Instead, their primary goal was to inspire each student to search for knowledge on their own and discover their own answers. I hope that this book will be the inspiration that puts you on the path to finding your own answers.