

Are You a Robot or a Doctor?

Written by Robert Hay Jr. CAE, Executive Vice President, Medical Society of DC

Recently I read a short story in *Wired Magazine's* fiction issue about an imagined future of medicine. In an oncology ward, a professional actor playing a physician went to administer pain medication to a terminally ill patient, only to be shocked when the patient asked emotional questions about her care. The actor, with a robot behind him monitoring his performance, was torn between being a real person and following a script written by an insurance company.

Describing the story makes it sound ridiculous, but also sounds eerily familiar. When I talk to physicians in any setting, I often hear a longing in their voice for the way medicine used to be practiced. Today, with an overload of codes to input, insurance companies dictating the “correct” treatments, and the demand to see more patients in less time makes the practice of medicine more a chore. Physicians at times feel like actors instead of practitioners, required to say the right thing or be sued. The doctor-patient relationship is suffering more than ever, and the idea that trained medical professionals can be replaced by an interface or someone acting as a physician is not as extreme as it may have been five years ago. Just ask the people who track their health statistics on their Apple Watch.

That is why I find my Pennsylvania counterpart's idea for a membership campaign to be so inspiring. The Pennsylvania Medical Society launched last year the “[Art of Medicine](#)” campaign. The videos and accompanying ads talk about returning to an understanding that what physicians do is not automatic, but has a human element. I think all physicians can agree that what they do, while based in science, has a human element to it that is underappreciated and creative in its own right.

The Medical Society of DC continually advocates for our physicians as practitioners, not automatons. One of the best parts of my job is talking to Council members, people in the Bowser administration, or members of the public about the good work you do every day. In 2019 we will have new ways and opportunities to highlight these stories, including this MSDC Leadership blog. I will conclude by making an ask of you. Share your stories, let us know the good work you are doing, and speak out on behalf of your profession. We can amplify your voice and help show your patients, lawmakers, and regulators that medicine in the District is not just a process, but an art form that makes the District the best place to practice medicine every day. Contact Pia Duryea (duryea@msdc.org) for more details.