

## From the President's Desk: 'Divided we fall'

July 2021—It has been a long time since the American public has been so terribly divided by politics. So many topics seem polarizing in our country right now. As pathologists, we should not allow these forces to fragment us. I fear that if we are not careful, we could find our community pulled apart, and that would be detrimental to those we should most protect—our patients.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the phrase, "United we stand, divided we fall." It is well worn but still meaningful. It's the official motto of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, where I was born.



Dr. Godbey

Within the CAP and each state's pathology society—in my view, the two groups every pathologist should belong to—it is imperative that we stick to the topics that unite us to keep our organizations strong and inclusive. We are all pathologists or soon-to-be pathologists, and we are all physicians. We are united on measures that allow us to better serve our patients and protect our practices. We should not be divided by politics, and there is no room for that in the CAP or state-level pathology societies.

I am not saying that we should not individually be politically active or work peacefully in other politically active groups. We should. I am and I do. But when it comes to the CAP and state societies, the politics should be about pathology, the laboratories we direct, and most importantly our patients.

The CAP and our state organizations need to interact with elected officials to make our voice heard and protect our patients, whether they are officials for whom some of us would never have thought about voting or officials for whom we would have voted. The CAP and our state organizations need to be able to interact with the appointed members of any administration, no matter who appointed them. When you interact with judicial officials, federal or state, you must think about doing the right thing for your patients and your profession, not who appointed the judge. Ask me, I know.

As I consider the commonalities we share as pathologists, as physicians, I keep coming back to the beginning. At some point in our beginning, we all took an oath or pledge. It may have been the Declaration of Geneva, the Osteopathic Oath or, as I did, the Hippocratic Oath. It is perhaps the first thing that marks our journey as practicing physicians, and, give or take a few words, the principles are the same for each of us.

The best presentation of such an oath that I can remember was at my daughter's medical school graduation ceremony at Columbia University. The dean reminded us that the Hippocratic Oath unites us with countless generations of physicians who preceded us, that it has been administered in languages no longer spoken and

sworn to gods no longer worshipped. The new physicians (and older physicians in the audience) recited it together.

It is worth taking a moment to go back to a few excerpts from that oath to remind ourselves how much we have in common. For this purpose, I will use the classical version translated by Ludwig Edelstein in 1943.

“Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice.” As physicians, we all pledge to enter all treatment settings without bias for political view or any other reason. In our pathology work, we treat every sample exactly the same, caring about all patients equally. A cancer diagnosis is no different for a liberal patient or a conservative one, a religious patient or an atheist. We do not take sides in our medicine, which also serves us well in the way we relate to each other as pathologists.

“What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men . . . I will keep to myself.” As physicians, we are trained to compartmentalize information, understanding what needs to be kept confidential. That gift also allows us to set aside partisan issues and focus on the medical issues most important to the care of every patient.

I truly hope we can maintain our focus on the things that unite us as pathologists and as physicians, for our benefit and for the benefit of our patients. This may be difficult, but it will make our community stronger and more effective if we can.

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