



Editorial Comment

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Editor

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We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness

—Declaration of Independence

As citizens of the United States, we feel we have the right to happiness. It says so right in the Declaration of Independence. The U.S. is actually the only nation with the goal of happiness in its founding document¹, yet we must always remember that the right listed here is not happiness itself, but the *pursuit* of it. Even the founding fathers realized that happiness is somewhat elusive, and it might not be attainable—yet its pursuit should be guaranteed.

Another point that we often forget when repeating the above quotation in protests or arguments about our “unalienable rights” is that one person’s pursuit may interfere or contradict someone else’s. This is inherent in our political system—we often see the two main political parties at odds with each other due to a differing opinion of what will make us happy as a nation or citizens of that nation.

A book I enjoyed and highly recommend is called The Geography of Bliss, by Eric Weiner. In this book, the author describes a year of his life in which he travelled around the world in search of happiness. He wanted to explore which country and which people were the happiest and why. It is a very fascinating exploration and one especially welcome to those who might feel discouraged with our current economic situation. In one chapter, Mr. Weiner describes his visit to Bhutan and mentions something a man named Karma says to him, “We don’t believe in this Robinson Crusoe happiness. All happiness is relational.”²

Currently, we as a nation worry about economics, health care, social security, etc. and we should continue to care about these things. I, too, care about these issues, but the outcome of these issues is not the key to my happiness. The happiness of my days is measured in conversations I have with my patients, story times with my children before bed, occasional midweek lunches with my husband, emails from my friends in other cities. My happiness is 100% relational.

Many studies conducted on patients dealing with chronic illness have demonstrated that positive relationships with doctors and loved ones make all the difference in length and quality of life. In fact, in one study, emotions such as happiness, optimism, and a positive attitude have been shown to add 7 years to life.³ In another study of leukemia patients preparing to undergo bone marrow transplants, 54% of those who said they had strong emotional support from their spouses, family, or friends were still alive after 2 years, while only 20% of those who

said they had little social support had survived.⁴

Be vocal about what this country needs in healthcare. Pay attention to local and national elections. Read current medical literature so you are up-to-date. Also remember that your true happiness and satisfaction will most likely not come in the form of a book or a voting booth, it will come from connecting with others in whatever way possible. The positive interactions you have with others, especially your patients, will undoubtedly create happiness on both sides of the relationship.

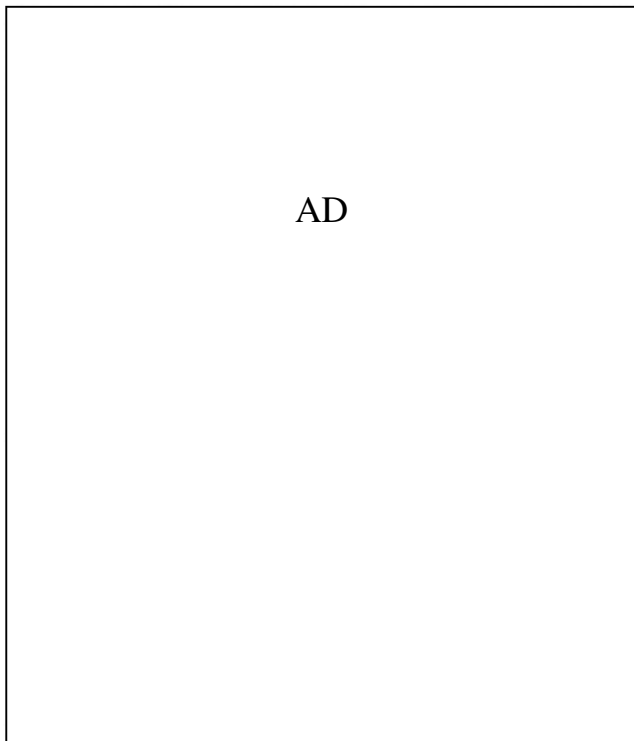
¹ Weiner, Eric. Geography of Bliss. Hachette Book Group, 2008. P. 312

² *Op. cit* p. 75

³ Danner et al., 2001. Danner D.D., Snowdon D., Friesen W.V.: Positive emotions in early life and longevity: findings from the nun study. *J Per Soc Psychol* 2001; 80:804-813.

⁴ Goleman D. Doctors find comfort is a potent medicine. *The New York Times*. February 16, 1991; p. B5, B8.

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