

Top 10 Reasons I like Being a Doctor

My son recently completed an application for an honor society. As I write this, my niece is completing an application for graduate school. The same types of questions appear continually on these applications. One of the universally asked questions is, “What are your most substantial accomplishments?”

Most people answering this question would describe personal or spiritual accomplishments. Most people would also likely describe professional accomplishments. As a physician, I would describe the pride I've experienced becoming a physician and practicing medicine.

Unfortunately, I believe many physicians are discouraged about their career choice. A recent study I read stated that over half the physicians surveyed would not want their children to become physicians. For many reasons, physicians do not recommend medicine as a profession to young people.

Physicians face a myriad of challenges including personal sacrifices of time and money in training, shrinking reimbursements, escalating costs, litigious attorneys, insurance encroachment on clinical decisions, just to name a few. Our patients are becoming more aware of these challenges and public trust in physicians has declined as well. It seems the media loves to “doctor-bash”, shining a spotlight on a few bad acts instead of the countless ways we care for people every day .

I am tired of “doctor-bashing”. Even when the media, the government, or the insurance companies devalue my profession, I will stand tall (at 5' 2”) with pride in my profession. I like being a doctor. It is my job, my profession, and my “calling” – or what I'm supposed to do. It's a way of thinking about people and caring for people. After retirement this doesn't go away, not even a little. We still care in the same way. Look around at conferences and be amazed at the retired physicians still learning.

I will always list becoming a physician as one of my proudest accomplishments. I suspect you will also. In the spirit of summer, lightness and levity, I have listed my “Top Ten Reasons I like Being a Doctor.” Now remember, this is in the spirit of laughter. Summer, and being a physician, should both be fun.

Top 10 Reasons I like Being a Doctor

10. GREAT DOCTOR TV SHOWS –

There are lots of fantastic medical TV shows, from Dr. Kildare, Dr. Welby, ER, Becker and my all-time favorite M*A*S*H.

9. EXOTIC CME LOCALES –

Never mind that my own Academy is placing burdensome and costly CME requirements on me; from the brochures I receive daily, I see that many of you are cruising to Thailand

or hiking Everest to achieve your CMEs. I've spent my last five CME sessions at the exciting Phoenix Convention Center.

8. EASY TO SOCIALIZE WITH STRANGERS –

Have you ever been the victim of the awkward party conversational lull with a stranger? No more! Once you confess to being a physician, you hear every intimate detail of this stranger's life. What a gift!

7. THE MONEY –

We know there was money to be made in the "olden days" of medicine. The problem was, you wisely invested all your money and retirement in a market fund that tanked. Younger physicians can't keep up with the costs of practicing. Scratch this one off your list and mentally change it to "The Top Nine Reasons I like Being a Doctor."

6. HOSPITAL PERKS –

What is more fun than free peanut butter and crackers in the surgeons' areas? How about the physician lounge food that I pay for and never eat? (You hospital based docs can have my helpings.) How about the physician parking always full with research fellows and house staff?

5. "Dr." IS A BETTER PREFIX THAN MISS, MRS, OR MS. –

I think all female physicians understand this.

4. BEING ON A TEAM –

Let's face it. Most of us were not among the best athletes in college. Many of us were the nerds, dreading phys ed. class. Healthcare takes a team approach and we're not only part of the team, we're the team captains. We get to run the play. I like that!

3. THE PRESCRIPTION PAD –

I thought my own doctor in college was a miracle worker when she fixed my first and only sinus infection. The prescription pad is something very powerful in the correct (our) hands.

2. I'M NOT A LAWYER –

With apologies to Tony Mitten and much of my family, this is self-explanatory.

1. SAVING LIVES –

OK, I do a lot of chronic disease management and preventive health care. I companion dying people. But I have saved lives and so have you. We have saved many lives as physicians and despite all the daily "doctor-bashing", we continue to save lives every day.

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In conclusion, I'm proud of what I do and being a physician. I hope you are too; you should be proud.

With pride,

Susan M. Whitely, MD

President

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