

Wisdom on elusive diagnoses

In the November issue of *Canadian Family Physician*, Dr Irene Lum brings up the interesting subject of medically unexplained symptoms¹—a burden to doctors and patients alike. This subject underlines a curious paradox: when diagnosis fails medicine, the response is to create another (in this case, “wastebasket”) diagnosis. That is not completely surprising. Diagnosis is medicine’s most important classification tool and the foundation of its practice. So how does medicine account for the things it cannot categorize? It creates a new category.

Early practitioners of scientific medicine seem to have been more patient about cases for which a diagnosis was elusive, and we can draw from their wisdom. Dr H.S. Patterson explained to the medical graduates of Pennsylvania College that “the laws of medicine are too undecided still to be susceptible of a perfect codification.”² Dr Silas Weir Mitchell reminded doctors that they often needed to wait before a disorder provided its “definite shape.”³

Rather than trying to find a diagnosis for everything, medicine might do well to realize that everything might not be diagnosable. Dr D.W. Propst opined in 1939: “It is sometimes impossible to adequately summarize in a name the whole state of a patient’s disequilibrium.”⁴ This view is echoed by Dr Jerome Kassirer in an era closer to our own: “Absolute certainty in diagnosis is unattainable, no matter how much information we gather, how many observations we make, or how many tests we perform ... more tests do not necessarily produce more certainty.”⁵

Diagnosis is a very useful medical tool because as it generalizes it also provides a pathway to treatment, explanation, and prognosis; however, it also obfuscates, as it seeks to represent the individual in a generic category that clearly cannot always suit. The old adage “You must treat the patient and not the disease” characterizes medicine’s amazing potential, but at the same time recognizes the limitations of the diagnosis to explain all that ails us. It is probably less important to diagnose those things that medicine cannot explain. Instead, it is more important to ask what medicine can do to help—ofttimes, it can do plenty.

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Competing interests
None declared

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Importance of registered kinesiologists

I read with great interest and appreciation the excellent article by Drs Jattan and Kvern in the December issue of *Canadian Family Physician*.¹ In Ontario, kinesiologists have been regulated health practitioners under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* since 2013, when the College of Kinesiologists of Ontario was proclaimed as the body responsible for the governance of the profession of kinesiology in Ontario. The scope of practice for kinesiologists is defined in the *Kinesiology Act, 2007* as “the assessment of human movement and performance and its rehabilitation and management to maintain, rehabilitate or enhance movement and performance.”²

Among the various groups of practitioners who are engaged in prescribing and guiding exercise programs, only registered kinesiologists are legally required to meet professional standards on a continual basis, engage in ongoing professional development, and meet entry-level requirements defined in legislation.

Ontario health regulators like the College of Kinesiologists of Ontario exist to protect the public. The College of Kinesiologists of Ontario sets and enforces standards of practice so that patients can receive safe, ethical, and competent health care from qualified health care professionals. With close to 3000 registered kinesiologists across Ontario, there are very few communities without services. The College of Kinesiologists of Ontario website carries a register of all kinesiologists in Ontario (www.coko.ca). In other provinces, kinesiology is not a regulated profession; however, kinesiologists might be found through the Canadian Kinesiology Alliance website (<https://www.cka.ca/en>).

Thank you for publishing an article promoting the integration of competent exercise specialists into health care teams. Registered kinesiologists currently work with many health care teams across Ontario, both in clinics and in hospitals. Some registered kinesiologists are also

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