

Kill as Few Patients as Possible: And 56 Other Essays on How to Be the World's Best Doctor. Arlan Cohn (Pseudonimo: Oscar London M.D. W.B.D.)

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RULE **I** BE JEWISH.

Now it is entirely possible—but laughable—to practice internal medicine and not be Jewish. I submit: who else but a Jew has the innate capacity for suffering that can get you through a working day in a medical office? I will say this—if some internists were not lucky enough to be born Jewish, surviving medical school and coping with managed care entitle them to honorary membership in the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and Job.

If “Jewish internist” is a redundancy, is “Non-Jewish internist” an oxymoron? No. Some of my best and brightest friends are non-Jewish internists.

One of them is Dr. Roy Walker of Fairfax, Iowa. In my third year of medical school, I was farmed out for eight weeks to Dr. Walker, an internist in a small rural town near Cedar Rapids. A short, stocky man, Roy Walker was born to be a third baseman but had somehow got sidetracked into medicine. I followed him through his working days and marveled at his ability to field his patients’ complaints and then step up and hit diagnostic home runs.

One morning at the local hospital, we visited the bedside of an old Amish blacksmith who was recovering from viral pneumonia. Fifteen of the patient’s relatives were jammed in the room. The men were bearded. The women wore no makeup. All were dressed in simple garments the color of Iowa wheat and topsoil. Except for the modern hospital bed it was a scene out of the Old Testament—the Book these people lived by.

Dr. Walker introduced me to every soul in the room, not missing one of their names. When I had shaken the last callused hand, the old man in the bed stared at me with fire in his eyes.

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"That star!" he cried, pointing a trembling, arthritic finger at the gold Mogen David dangling from my neck. "Dr. London, are you a Chew?"

Uh-oh, I thought, my first brush with anti-Semitism and I'm outnumbered sixteen to one.

"Yes, I'm a Jew," I replied, looking him in the eyes.

The room fell silent. "I knew it!" said the old man triumphantly, extending both arms to me. "A Chew!"

The faces around me lit up with smiles of delight and amazement. I was the first living Jew these Fundamentalists had ever seen—a genuine Hebrew, a biblical celebrity! Charlton Heston's Moses was a walk-on part compared to my role as a Jewish medical student in Fairfax, Iowa.

It was necessary for me to shake everyone's hand again. Several of the people reverently touched the sleeves of my short white jacket. Dr. Walker looked crestfallen.

I sometimes regret leaving Iowa for the East Coast. A Jew moving to New York to practice internal medicine is certainly hauling coals to Newcastle. I could have spent my career in Iowa, blissfully reaping adulation each day in the office—an honest-to-God Jew among the honest-to-God Amish.

RULE 2 HAVE A LOVELY OFFICE.

My patients' treatment begins with my receptionist's smile. A receptionist should not only have a dynamite smile but also radiate perfect health, competence, and serenity. If a male doctor finds a female receptionist with all these traits, it will be necessary for him to fly off with her to Acapulco, leaving his marriage and his practice in a shambles. I tell my younger colleagues, "Try to find a nice receptionist, but don't overachieve."

A doctor's office should be decorated tastefully—but not expensively, unless he prefers a burglar over a janitor to clean up after hours.

To practice world-class medicine, a physician needs a consultation room, three examining rooms, a padded cell, and a restroom. If he's not into padded cells, he can lock himself up from time to time in his consultation room and scream into a throw pillow.

He must not pipe music into his waiting room. If he has a burning desire to inflict music on his patients, he should bring in a live string quartet and restrict them to Haydn and Schubert. If he has a largely Chicano practice, a mariachi band is acceptable, provided the trumpet player mutes his instrument and the tenor refrains from spritzing during high notes.

If he wants to destroy his practice, he might consider bringing in an accordion player. (One night at a restaurant, I reached out and plunged my dinner knife into the bellows of an approaching accordion; the stricken look on the player's face when the wind was knocked out of his "Lady of Spain" was well worth the price of damages.)

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A RULE TO LIVE BY:

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Kill as Few Patients as Possible

Here is advice that will gladden—and possibly strengthen—the hearts of patients and doctors alike.

Feed a Cold, Starve a Lawyer.

Don't Call a Rose a Rose; Call Her Mrs. Schwartz.

If You Drink, Don't Drive; If You Smoke, Don't Bother Wearing Your Seatbelt.

*If You Don't Believe in Prescribing Valium for Your Anxious Patients,
Be Sure to Take One Yourself.*

Since Death Is Very Still, Keep Moving.

*If You Think You're Indispensable, Check Your Appointment Book
a Week After You Drop Dead.*

With unassailable logic and rapier wit, Dr. Oscar London defends his claim to be the World's Best Doctor by explaining the 57 rules he follows. Follow along as you laugh and learn how your own physician can become the world's *second* best doctor.

*About the author:
Oscar London is the pseudonym
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