

“Half of us are blind, few of us feel, and we are all deaf.”

Sir William Osler

Hi Everyone

This week's Departmental Acknowledgment goes to one of our senior house officers **Conall Francoeur**. It comes as a result of an experience I had while on call last weekend.

To preface, despite over 20 years of being an attending in pediatric neurology at a university tertiary care centre I have yet to get use to the capriciousness of catastrophe due to the sudden and severe illness of a child. Perhaps if I ever do it will be a signal to put away the reflex hammer and retire.

Last Friday a family in the Eastern Townships woke up intact and whole. Mother, father, 2 year old and a 2 month old. The roads were slick with the first ice of winter. Mom, a paramedic by profession, was driving, the two month old was appropriately restrained in a car seat in back. A car on the road stops suddenly, mom's car is trailing behind and hits into the back. While stationary, mom's car in turn gets slammed into from the rear by a truck. The first responders on the scene includes a SQ officer who turns out to be the father. Mom has several fractures and a concussion and the now deeply comatosed two month old is transported to our institution and PICU. Unfortunately the cerebral injuries are too massive and the two month was essentially brain dead upon arrival. I examined the child late that afternoon and returned at 11 PM that night to do a neurological determination of death that would enable proceeding to possible organ donation. One knows that no amount of therapy, SSRIs or time will ever make that family truly whole again as they were when dawn broke that morning.

Whenever I am in the hospital late at night it always feels so quiet and serene and almost cathedral in its qualities. I am also hugely reminded that manning our front lines are our house officers. Young people typically in their twenties still in training, they are in the ER, on the wards, in the NICU and PICU providing on the spot medical care to ill newborns, infants and children. They work long hours with an oft changing schedule under very stressful conditions in return for the on-the-job apprenticeship that is a residency. Conall was in the PICU that evening as he is currently a PICU fellow.

Conall was mature beyond his years by my observation. Dealing with the shattered family, conveying sensitive and devastating information, managing the supportive cardio-respiratory and fluid care necessary to support vital organs, as well as co-ordinating a host of specialty services whose evaluation would be needed. He did so calmly, professionally and with an even-keel. He never showed any outward strain. I was proud of him and our residency program that could so adeptly, and consistently, produce such excellence. Clearly we are doing something right here within our Department if this is our product. All the members of our community should take pride in our resident staff.

Of course Conall has good genes. His father is a somewhat eminent community-based pediatrician and his mother heads up nursing at the MUHC. He also has a nice work-life balance with an active interest in sports (tennis, rugby), politics and social media. Not unexpectedly given his Irish heritage he has the gift for the gab and volunteers for the St Patrick Society as an auctioneer.

But it wasn't what he said but how he said it that made the impression on me. It was mostly in the silences, not the words. An important life lesson for this veteran.

Have a great weekend everyone

Michael