

Preface

In these essays I speak to different listeners—to medical students, to their teachers, to physicians whose lives and energies are committed to the care of patients, and to patients themselves. The unifying theme is the conviction that in sharing what Anatole Broyard termed “the wonder, terror and exaltation of being on the edge of being” physicians will be nourished and sustained. It is my belief that this will inevitably lead to medical care that is more “humanistic” and compassionate. The origins of many of the ideas, insights, and thoughts that appear in these essays can be traced to my involvement with the program in Humanistic Medicine that has been an integral part of the education of medical students and house staff on the medical services at New York University Medical Center for more than fifteen years. Weekly small group seminars on the wards, in the Medical Intensive Care Unit, and in the AIDS Unit have created a sanctioned portion of the curriculum which allows medical students and young physicians to explore their responses to the process of becoming physicians. The program in Humanistic Medicine has given me the opportunity to work closely with an extraordinary group of xv

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xvi colleagues who serve as seminar leaders and to spend countless hours in small group discussions with medical students and young physicians-in-training.

Medical students and young physicians are more willing and able to examine and identify the feelings that underlie their daily interactions with patients than are many of my colleagues. We, physicians and medical educators, simply do not set aside the time to sit for an hour each week to explore our feelings and responses to our daily experiences. Most of us regard it as a luxury to “put a mark” on some comment or incident and examine it in greater depth with our colleagues. I strongly disagree. I have come to regard the opportunity to examine some of the many powerful experiences in my work with my colleagues as a necessity rather than a luxury. Howard Gardner, in *Creating Minds*, points out the importance of interactions with close colleagues in the process of creativity. These interactions in our seminars in Humanistic Medicine have led me to examine the process of becoming and remaining a caring physician and have been the stimulus to write this book.