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Perspectives
Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCPC

Bio:
Dr. Fisher is Professor Emeritus of Dermatology at the University of Toronto Medical School. He graduated from the University of Geneva Medical School in Switzerland in 1954. He served in the Israel Defence Forces as a naval officer and after discharge was awarded a French Government Scholarship at the St. Louis Hospital in Paris, in the Department of Dermatology headed by Prof. Degos.

In 1963, he moved to Calgary, Alberta, where he started the Division of Dermatology at the newly established Foothills Hospital. He moved to Israel in 1973 to head the Department of Dermatology at the Sheba Medical Centre in Tel-Hashomer, the largest hospital in the country.

In 1976, he moved to the Wellesley Hospital in Toronto where he was Chief of Dermatology until 1999 when he semi-retired and moved to Israel. He still sees patients and remains involved in teaching. He is the author of 75 scientific papers and co-author of a textbook on genital skin disorders. He is a widower with three children, one of whom is a dermatologist.

1. What would be your advice to a newly qualified doctor?
Treat your patient as you would like to be treated. Always keep an open mind to new ideas even if they sound strange. Dare to put your novel ideas to practical use provided no harm ensues to your patients. Just think how laser treatment and Botox got started. Listen to the old-timers, you still can learn from them. Listen to the young-timers, some of their ideas are fresh and original. Never give up the opportunity to teach; you learn the most from it.

2. Which patient has had the most effect on your work, and why?
There were several patients from whom I learned valuable lessons, but one patient sticks out in particular. A middle-aged woman with slight lupus erythematosus of her face, who was coming to see me week after week with the same questions, wanting to go over the same lab reports which were normal. All my explanations were forgotten from one visit to the next. On one very busy afternoon I told her: “Lady, you drive me crazy.” I will never forget the hurt and surprise on her face. She left and never came back. She was not aware she did anything wrong, and maybe I was the only one who could give her the assurance that she so badly needed. This episode has haunted me ever since, but it taught me the most valuable lesson – never, ever to lose my patience again, which I have not.

3. What is the best piece of advice you have received and from whom?
“Not to trust everything you read or accepted dogmas. Rely on your judgment after obtaining solid proofs.” — Harvey Blank, MD.

4. What medical figure from history would you most like to have a drink with? Why?
Sir William Osler. It would be wonderful to be exposed to a phenomenal mind of astute observation and original thinking.

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