

# Occam's Razor

By Jordan Rogers

Occam's razor dates back to the 14th century logician William of Ockham. It is the idea that, when solving a problem, the simplest explanation is the most probable. This rule of simplicity, if you will, is applicable even to the medical realm. When approaching a patient with an illness, it is more likely that he or she is ailing from a myriad of common conditions rather than one extremely rare, complicated disease. At times, patients may seem to be nothing more than the bacteria or virus plaguing them. But Occam would say that simplest explanation is better. Why not, then, treat the patient as you see him or her first: a human being?

Although this concept of keeping things simple is routine for some physicians, it can be the most challenging of tasks. There is no glory, after all, in solving a problem that is not difficult or complex. Sometimes in all of the learning we do, we miss the most important and simple of all lessons: We are no different than our patients on the inside. Therefore, there is no reason our patients should be treated differently on the outside.

This idea might seem a little contradictory to the entire concept of medicine. Is it not more important to cure the person's illness than to worry about the person? Wouldn't it be easier for the physician to be methodical when approaching your care if she/he is unperturbed about your fears?

We are all patients at one time or another. Even the most stoic is faced with the concept of mortality at some point. It is a frightening moment when your life is in another's hands. Some doctors fail to remember this when making rounds. The man or woman lying in the bed in front of the doctor is a person, and he or she is composed of the same parts.

We have come to a place in medicine in which the most human of all vocations requires some inhumanity. It is an irony that somehow we have arrived here. Subsequently, it must seem especially ludicrous to be at the receiving end of this irony. To a patient receiving a life-changing diagnosis from

a tersely composed physician, the very moment must seem altogether nightmarish. It is one of the most puzzling of all scenarios in medicine, one that requires the least assumptions to remedy.

Occam's theory can be loosely translated from the Latin, "entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem" to mean, "things must not be multiplied more than necessary." In other words, do not complicate the uncomplicated. Do not allow what once may have come as second nature to be lost in years of training and expertise. Even with the honing of skills we undergo, it is quite possible to retain the human touch we as people must incur to become better doctors. Seeing a patient as more than a disease, more than a bed, and more than a "teaching opportunity" is critical to the field right now, yet is something that is hard to apply. While it seems like a jump in logic, the answer is simple: We should see the patient, as we would want ourselves seen. This is the most inherent and obvious approach, with the fewest assumptions. If doctors follow this path, all of the care and medical knowledge that follows will surely not be lost. We will give the patient what he or she needs most, which quite simply consists of a human being speaking to another human being. This is the heart of medicine; this in itself is the answer to the incongruities that plague the physician-patient relationship today.

We are given a hard task as future doctors. While learning the science and practice of the field, we must not forget the true meaning and value of what we are doing. It is an incredible gift to be chosen to heal the sick; a gift that is even frightening at times. Yet we were chosen for a reason. Regardless of where this journey takes us, we will be faced with difficult trials along the way. It is imperative that even in the face of the most difficult of moments, we remember the Razor. For it is in the face of adversity that we find our strength and even the answers to the most challenging of life's questions. Sometimes, the answers are lying right in front of us. Yet it may be a test of strength alone to choose the simplest one.