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The Agnostic's Prayer

*Dear God
If there is a God
Save my Soul
If I have a Soul*

Anonymous

These are the dog days of August, and this issue of the *Journal*, like the humidity, probably will lie on your desk for several weeks. The humidity and heat upset our biorhythms, which cry out for rest. Perhaps this is why August has become synonymous with vacation: like sleep, August vacations let the subconscious do its magic and put things in perspective.

Scientifically it has been a good year—additional studies support the value of PET in tumors; new myocardial imaging agents have done well in clinical studies; a radiolabeled antibody was approved for clinical uses; and tumor applications for sestamibi are growing. Socioeconomically it has been tumultuous—dissatisfaction with the cost of health care, spiraling higher because of addiction to technological innovations, has led to clamor for change. Interest groups, sensing an opportunity to have their moment in the sun have become more numerous than ants at a picnic. Even a fourier transform cannot interpret the strident tones emanating from Hilary's minions.

The current tumult has had its share of victims, among them caregivers whose prestige is now challenged. From the time of Hippocrates practitioners of the healing arts have been held in high esteem. But as the system comes to grips with the anger, frustration, fear and concern of an outspoken public, the government systematically chips away at the value of these practitioners. No distinction is made between care given by a physician and that given by a nursing assistant; they are both "providers."

This problem is not one of semantics only. Diminishing the professions makes it easier to formulate programs that mark us as the enemy. When we look in the mirror, however, we do not see reflections of evil but the caring faces of helpful beings. Those who will judge us must see as we see ourselves.

Perhaps it is time to appeal to a higher authority, one who may intervene on our behalf.

H. William Strauss, Editor
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