PET images with $^{11}C$-L-DOPA labeled in the beta-position (A,B) and carboxy-position in (C) a patient with gastrinoma. Study A was performed prior to the beginning of therapy, Study B after 6 mo of therapy with somatuline and Study C on the same day as Study B. See pages 32-37.
January

January is the first month of the new year. It is named for the mythological Greek god Janus, a two-faced figure with one face looking back at the past and the other facing the future. Our emphasis each January has been on the new beginnings and opportunities available in the year ahead. There is, however, no need to ignore the other aspect of Janus: to examine and summarize the past year’s “near” accomplishments, the “might-have-beens” and the personal and professional disappointments.

The merit in this exercise is not simply to reexamine our failures or a morbid opportunity to simmer in our disappointments. Rather, by reviewing the less than satisfactory episodes, we can ask ourselves “why?” and determine a course of action or response to events and challenges which may produce the result we think we would prefer. In both professional and personal activities, the outcomes we seek may not always have been simply dependent on our response. By reviewing these disappointments, we may find that we have not failed and that no other outcome was feasible. Alternately, perhaps we can identify what might have been done differently. After all, it is our own performance that we are most likely to influence.

I recall with some amusement a recurrent scenario during my earlier training days. Some of my fellow students and trainees would inquire if “such and such” would be on the exam. They would ask the instructor or perhaps one another, “Do we need to know this?” This wish, expressed as a question, represents “magical thinking,” as if asking the question aloud would somehow produce the desired result. Despite their own good judgment telling them that an informed person should know this or that collection of facts, their wish was that it was not so. When the signs clearly point to one conclusion, but we hope or perhaps believe that we will get a different result without changing our effort or response, we are simply engaged in magical thinking. Rather than change what we are doing, we simply hope that events around us were different. Are we really likely to attain our goals if we follow directions that we know go elsewhere?

Perhaps by examining our disappointments in the past year, we can identify what could have made a difference had we heeded the evidence available to us but which we chose to ignore. Possibly, the next time we confront a challenge, we will recognize the realities of the situation better and appreciate what we must do to obtain the preferred outcome. Perhaps, as a result of this review of the past, the next time we confront a crisis, the outcome will be more satisfying to us. We will recognize what we need to do and hopefully have no regrets about the result.

— Stanley J. Goldsmith, MD

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