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PREVIEW RESPONSE

Beyond Treating Disease: Reclaiming Human Flourishing as the Purpose of Medicine



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"As a hospitalist - a physician specializing in the care of hospitalized adults - I care for individuals during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. Professor VanderWeele's reflections on flourishing resonate deeply with my clinical experience, particularly the recognition that suffering and flourishing are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I have encountered patients whose physical conditions improve while they continue to struggle with questions of meaning, hope, and spiritual well-being. Conversely, patients facing serious illness may experience profound spiritual growth, reconciliation, or renewed purpose despite their physical suffering. These encounters remind me that clinical improvement and human flourishing do not always go hand in hand.

This apparent paradox has increasingly shaped my scholarship, particularly my research examining spiritual well-being, chaplaincy interventions, and their potential relationships with patient experiences and hospital outcomes. It raises a question I continue to grapple with: How can we better understand and support patients' spiritual well-being, both in clinical practice and through research, while recognizing that not everything that matters to patients can be easily measured?

More broadly, Professor VanderWeele's reflections invite us to reconsider how academic medicine defines success. Our institutions appropriately emphasize clinical outcomes, quality metrics, research productivity, and scientific advancement. Yet, I wonder whether these measures tell the whole story of what it means to succeed in medicine. Beyond these traditional measures of success, how can we create healthcare and academic environments where patients, healthcare professionals, and the communities we serve can truly flourish?"

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