

Current Perspective

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Dick Mills—Playing Through Stoppage Time

COVID-19 took another ophthalmologist—and a great one. Richard P. Mills, MD, MPH, passed away on May 9 in Seattle. Dick's curriculum vitae shone with the whole spectrum of professional accomplishments—talented clinician, dedicated teacher, well-published clinician-investigator, and professional leader. At the Academy he held numerous committee positions, chaired EyeCare America, and, following election by his peers, served as Academy President in 1995.

But Dick described his term as Chief Medical Editor for *EyeNet* as “my favorite thing I’ve done professionally.” As the son of an argumentation and debate professor at Northwestern University, Dick loved words. His 14 years of *EyeNet* Opinion columns were legendary. His last one in February 2016 was entitled “14 Years: Was It as Good for You as It Was for Me?” In it, he wrote: “There are men and women of letters, of numbers, of papers, and of books. I’m a word guy. I’ve always adored the sounds of words, and the way pairs of words fit together, alliteratively or oxymoronically. And spelling. I turned off spell check as soon as I discovered I could spell better than it could.”

In “Are You Anancastic? Just a Little Bit Helps” he confessed, “Sometimes I go searching, like a pig rooting for a truffle, for exactly the right word to use in an Opinion.” (He then marched forth to explain why all ophthalmologists are, or should be, anancastic.)

His writing was pithy, and his tone vacillated between bemused, wry, and annoyed. At times he could be downright curmudgeonly. He was anything but solipsistic—reveling in the eccentricities of the world and people around him.

At this time, when all seems dour and COVID-centric, I’d like to take this moment to share with you some of the random ruminations (a little alliteration, Dick) of one of ophthalmology’s true statesmen:

February 2004. While pondering procrastination as one of the deadly sins, he opined upon vultures that “don’t pounce upon carrion. They circle high above, effortlessly gliding on rising desert thermals, eyeballing their next meal . . . I don’t know if they enjoy circling, but I am certain that



they don’t beat themselves up about the delay.” He then observed that procrastinating was simply “circling time.”

June 2006. He divided ophthalmologists into hitchhikers (who don’t contribute to the public good but are beneficiaries of it) and the drivers (those who do). He concluded, “And for those behind the wheel, in the spirit of collegiality, I hope you don’t try to run the hitchhikers off the road.”

August 2014. A personal favorite revealed the true meaning behind health

insurance euphemisms, including: “*Accountable care organization (ACO)*: An entity by which money flows through the hospital, where it is laundered and shrunk before distribution to physicians” and “*Bending the cost curve*: The equivalent of orthodontia for health care. Guess who’s tightening the wires?”

December 2014. Dick was not a fan of EHRs—in part because they reduced language to mouse clicks. He noted, “. . . experiencing today’s EHR marketplace is a lot like living with teenagers. Having grown too fast over the last few years, they are awkward, surly, uncoordinated, picky, spendthrift, and immature. And they have plenty of zits. Despite their many different personalities, they all strive to emulate each other. They have great potential, yet most of it is unrealized.”

July 2013. Four months after he experienced a hyperkalemic cardiac arrest with 10 minutes of hospital CPR, intubation, and defibrillation, Dick related the story in detail for his readers with typical humor and irony. In that Opinion, he wrote about the concept of “stoppage time” in soccer and shared these words: “When the game is supposed to be over, it is allowed to continue for the duration of stoppage time—but only the referee knows for sure how long that is going to be . . . So I’m on my personal stoppage time now. Like the soccer team, I am planning to go full speed ahead. I’ve always enjoyed living my life, and I’ll especially savor this second time around.”

We are all delighted that the referee gave Dick seven more years and that he used the time to inform and enthrall us all.

Enjoy all of Dr. Mills’ *EyeNet* editorials at aao.org/eyenet/archive-dr-mills-opinions.