Four pieces of advice for new neurologists

Michael Wynn, DO

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Correspondence

Dr. Wynn

mwynn@wynn.mvipa.org

1.

A demented patient remembers more
than she has forgotten. Remember this.
She will forget to remind you.
Focus on the picnic she had
with her love under the Chestnut tree—
iced tea, peanut butter pie, Verdi on the BBC,
then listen to her describe her scars
from her days in the Women's Army Corps.

2.

If a patient is older than 85 talk to him
like he is 105
or 30. Even better, don't talk.

3.

Mr. Smith is angry at his stiff leg
and right hand tremor. His language
is colorful as a medieval flag
carried into battle.
Imagine the gibbous moon
rising over Agincourt, the field
all black arrows and scarlet ego.
October mist rises and swirls
flowing with easy purpose
over the newly dead
without deference to lineage.
Mr. Smith wants to move like that.

4.

You are as full of promise
as a not-quite-ripe lime.
More than knowledge,
what you have to offer your first patient,
is ancient. A Bristlecone pine.
Be ageless.

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