

Grandfather, are you a lanternist?

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Grandfather, are you a lanternist? because I hear you talk about it and I know you have a flashlight on your bedside table and that you use it to poke around in the pool house and sometimes to look at my throat, when it hurts, helped by that "little wood" that makes me almost sick.

Let's see, David, the "little wood" is called tongue depressor and no, I am not a "lanternist" in spite of using the flashlight from time to time. What I am is Internist, Specialist in Internal Medicine, which is a specialty of the Physicians just like you can be a Cardiologist or Traumatologist like your cousins; and just like Dad is a fighter and acrobatic pilot that is a specialty among those who are military that handle aircraft.

So, Grandfather, what is it about Internal Medicine and Internists?

I think it's going to cost me a bit to explain it but I'll try. The motto, the phrase that my Society, that is to say, the group in which we met Internists has chosen to define us is: "The global vision of the sick person", and this means that we face the sick who come to our consultation trying to be attentive to everything that happens to him: what he tells us and what we ask him about what surrounds him.

A few days ago you had a headache. To give you something and improve it, first, I had to understand well what you did and ate the day before because it can influence, if you had been in the sun for a long time, if you had had arguments with your sisters, if the training went well or you hit your head more than usual. If you talked to Daddy from Gabon via skype, if your neck or

neck hurts from behind, if you have any other illnesses, although it apparently has nothing to do with your head, if it hurts like Mom when she has her migraines... Eventually, after seeing if you have fever, after doing some simple tests moving your head and legs and seeing how you move alone; with all this information, I could get to tell you: David, nothing major happens, I will give you a Paracetamol and tomorrow you will have passed so to bed !.

Grandfather then, other specialists are not necessary?

No son, it is not that, it is known that I have not explained well. Let's make another attempt: You remember when we sailed on the boat from Raxó to Portonovo; As we were advancing, we saw, in some detail, Sinas, the port of Raxó, Xiorto, the purifiers of the beach of Pampaído, the mountain of Pampaído, the Bois, the beach of Agra, the one of the quarries, Punta Meilàn, the beach of Areas, Palacios, Sanxenxo, Silgar; Punta Bicaño and Portonovo. I pointed out each place but we could not see what was happening in each and every one of those places. We saw and felt each site but not all at once, remember?

Of course, Grandpa, it was a great excursion, a lot of fun.

Well now think of that big bird we saw in the quarry... It is possible that it was a Cormorant or even an Albatross that although rare can be seen occasionally as happened to us. Now think how one of those birds see our voyage; he is able, from the height, to see both Sinás and Portonovo and analyze the possibilities of eating or resting placidly in one place or ano-

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ther and what would be lost or gained sleeping in Areas or fishing in Portonovo. Well, internists see from above globally and we value the possible relationships that exist between one site and another without forgetting the rest of the picture.

Already, grandfather, but you have not answered me yet, are the other Specialists necessary or not?

Of course they are, moreover, they are essential to know in detail each of the places on the coast. The Cormorant speaks to the Seagulls of each of the beaches and they tell him what is in each square meter of its surface, investigate every characteristic and situation, develop inspection techniques and solutions to problems that arise and are told to the Cormorant so that he has more data when making his decisions. The rest of the Specialists are as much or more important than the generalists because in collaboration, in team with them the best results are achieved for the whole coast; they know in greater detail what happens at each point and have the generosity of telling it to that Cormorant that flies the whole ensemble.

Grandfather, if it is so important to know what happens at each site, would not it be enough for each Specialist to act in the place he knows best?

Now son. It's a possibility, but to be able to understand it better let's go back to the coast's example. If you clean the water in the quqrry, it will improve fishing in Areas and increase the quality of Sinás mussels; if you cut those trees in Pampaído, more waste will reach the sea if you increase the number of mussel beds you will transform the quantity and type of the fish of the

whole area. Everything is related to everything and the measures we take to solve one problem could sometimes hamper the solution of another. Even more when we think there might be long lasting disorders that will require many interventions like in the case of chronic patients; fragile ones who have less defences; or others a little bit more frail with the passage of time: elderly people.

The Internists, together with the Family Doctors, we approach the sick thinking about the operation at once and orderly of all the organs and apparatuses, taking into account their families and their origin, paying attention to their state of mind and their expectations of future and trying to live the best they can as long as possible. Do you understand now? It is like the great-grandmother's skeins of wool when she used to knit. If you pull one end is in the opposite end where a new knot appears. You have to go with a lot of care, measuredly and on the lookout for details which are basic to get everything in order.

The boy accompanied the grandfather's smile with a serious face and after a few seconds of possible reflection in which he seemed to be absorbed, he inquired again:

Grandpa, when I grow up, can I be an Internist?

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Dr. Carlos M. San Román-Terán has nothing to disclose.