

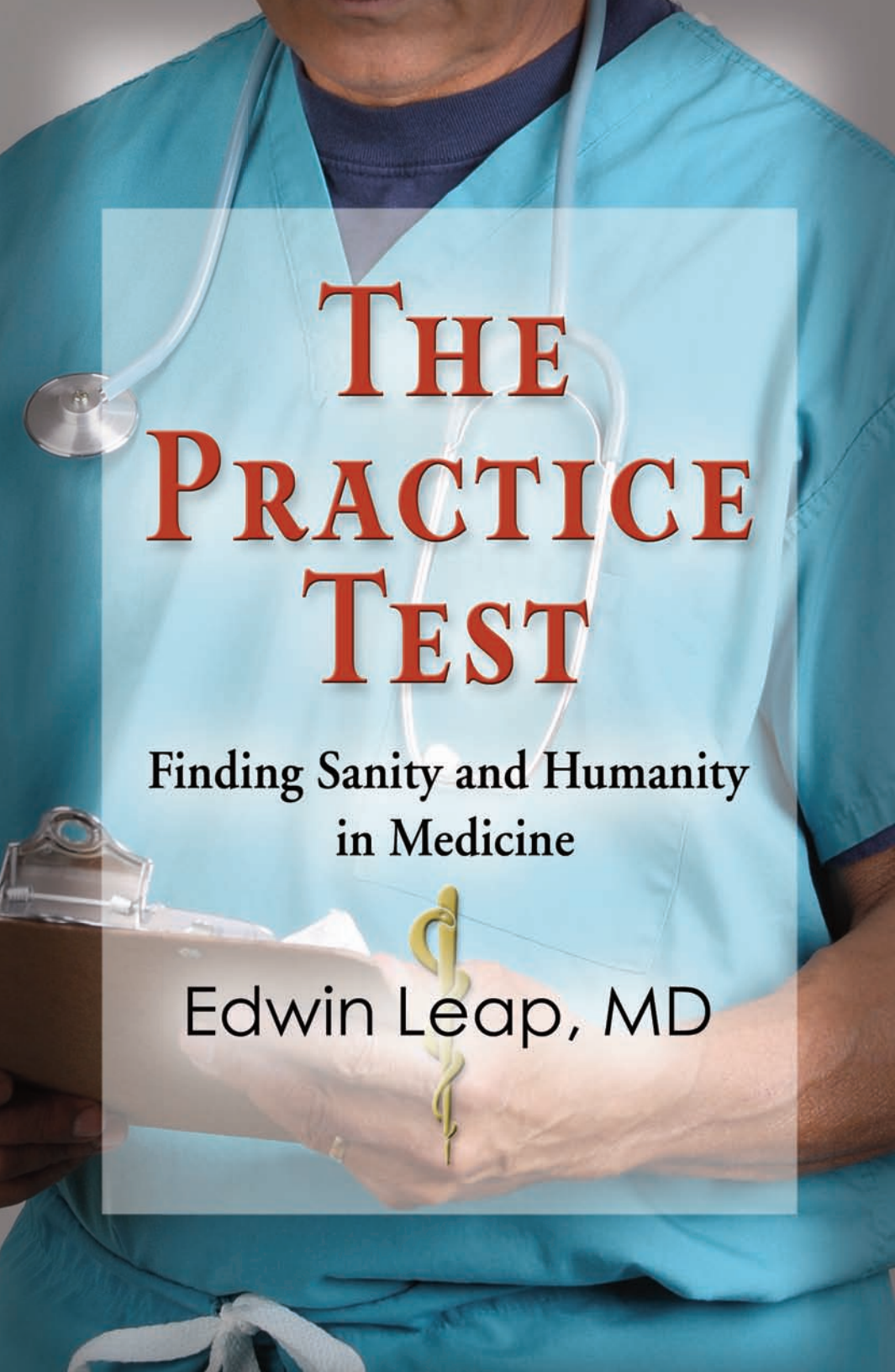
The Practice Test is a book of questions written in a sometimes humorous imitation of medical board exams. However, rather than addressing the science of medicine, The Practice Test asks (and answers) questions about life as a physician. It is a book written to help future and current physicians to develop, or rediscover, balance, perspective and joy in their lives and in the practice of their chosen profession.

## **The Practice Test**

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A photograph of a doctor from the chest down, wearing teal scrubs over a dark blue t-shirt. A silver stethoscope is draped around their neck. Their right hand is visible, holding a clipboard with a white sheet of paper. On their right index finger, a green caduceus (a staff with a snake) is visible. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# THE PRACTICE TEST

Finding Sanity and Humanity  
in Medicine

Edwin Leap, MD

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First Edition

## **Question 5**

**I don't mean to sound sexist, but frankly this question generally applies to men more than women. So here goes: you're at a restaurant with your wife when a lovely woman walks past the table, waves and tosses her hair and says, 'Hey doc! Thanks for last night!' Your wife looks at you as if to say, 'please explain...quickly.' You should say?**

- a) I met her at work the other day. Her name is Chastitee...isn't that adorable?**
  
- b) Hey, that reminds me honey, do you have any leopard print stilettos?**
  
- c) Focus on cutting your steak and pretend nothing happened, then fake a seizure.**
  
- d) Explain what actually happened. You treated her mother, who had pneumonia, but the the young lady was very flirtatious, which you find comical because you love your wife so much you'd never leave her for anyone or anything.**

### *THE PRACTICE TEST*

The truth always wins, so 'd' is the best answer. (Assuming it is the truth...) But more importantly, and the point of this particular question, is that when you are a physician, people will think that you are rich, powerful, charming and capable.

Your wife (or husband) will know the truth. That you are hard-working, struggling, charming and capable; and also that you snore loudly, that you have terrible allergies, that you still collect Pokemon cards (or Holiday Barbies) and that when you are vomiting, you sound like a walrus in mating season.

People are easily deceived by what they want to be true. And our culture, for heaven knows what reason, thinks doctors are more interesting than we really are.

Medical school should have disabused you of any such notions. (Or will, if you haven't yet gone). Doctors are human beings, full of flaws. Doctors are extreme nerds who adore books and learning. The one consistent theme of medicine is that doctors are capable of intense focus and persistence. This is not that interesting to people who want to be with you for money or position (or island vacations). But then, they seldom realize it until too late.

Part of the reason they don't realize it is that, after a while, we forget. We believe the myths. We sometimes think we are cool, dashing, erudite and stylish. And so, we are often tempted to move on; that is, to leave behind those who knew we weren't all those things. By which I mean that we leave our spouses behind. The ones who remember us as skinny, desperate college kids, or struggling, exhausted residents. We believe that we actually are what those attractive, seductive women (or men)

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think we are. And those tired wives or husbands, busily raising our children while we are on call, become casualties.

Here's the thing. If you're single in medicine, flirt away and have fun (but be kind and gentle). But if you're married, if you're engaged, if you're committed to someone, don't be deceived. Avoid all of the dangerous hints and offers of affection. Learn to ignore that 'we're all alone, and this work is so stressful, so hold me in the broom closet' crap and hang-on to your integrity. Protect the ones you vowed to love.

Drink some coffee, do your jobs, smile graciously and decline the offers of those who would wreck your life and the lives of your spouses and children. After all, the one flirting with you is probably 'crazy as a bed-bug.'

So go buy your wife some leopard print stilettos. She might just wear them!

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## **Question 12**

**When you are frustrated and young people ask you if they should be doctors, you should...**

- a) Laugh out loud**
- b) Tell them a scary story about a lawsuit.**
- c) Tell them to go into law because 'that's where the money is!'**
- d) Encourage them, as you were encouraged.**

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Answer? **d.** Someone probably tried to warn you away, but you didn't listen. And your patients are better off for it. Yes, medicine is perilous, frustrating, sometimes unrewarding (in the short run) and has an uncertain future. But we need physicians. You and I will all be injured and sick at some point. Our children will develop diseases. Our grandchildren will wreck their cars. If everyone is a lawyer, or businessman or anything but medicine, who will save lives? So please, encourage the next generation. Do it with honesty, open their eyes about the future, but do so gently and with hope. And by imbuing their dreams with meaning and visions of greatness.

If everyone listened to detractors, to those who said, 'it's bad, it's dangerous, it's not worth it, do something easy,' then no one would have stayed at Valley Forge, explored the frontier, fought smallpox, developed airplanes, confronted Nazis or Communists, traveled in space or asked their wives out for the first time.

Sometimes, however rarely, it's good that the young and excited don't listen to the old and bitter.

## **Question 18**

**What your children want most is...**

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- a) a new car at age 16**
- b) tuition to an Ivy League College**
- c) the latest electronics**
- d) you**
- e) a pet monkey**

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Answer **d**, they want you, doctor. 'Paging doctor dad, paging doctor mom! Please call home, where you are wanted and loved!'

Doctors notoriously neglect their children. To the extent that practice involves long hours and often critical activities to save life and limb, it's easy to see why docs aren't home enough. On the other hand, considering the absolutely essential nature of your children, the way you had them, love them, and want the best for them, it might be wisest to back off, make a little less, need a little less and be with them!

Studies show that intact families have lower rates of drugs use, criminal behavior, alcoholism, promiscuity and other bad things. And by intact, I don't just mean 'not divorced.' I mean engaged. You have to be there for little things, like soccer games and big things like first dates. And for every hug and word of affirmation in between.

Think of it this way; your children, next to your spouse, are your most important patients in the whole wide world.

If you want to apply the 'customer service model,' apply it to them. Let them be your most important customers! Otherwise, they'll be mad, they'll act out for your attention, and one day when you have all the money and cars and boats and time, they'll be nowhere to be found. Now, go listen to 'Cats in the Cradle,' by Harry Chapin. Take some tissue.

## **Question 19**

**The most important specialty is...**

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- a) family medicine**
- b) surgery**
- c) emergency medicine**
- d) internal medicine**
- e) pediatrics**
- f) There is no specialty that is most important!**



*EDWIN LEAP*

Answer: Obviously, since I'm an emergency physician, emergency medicine is most important! No, just kidding. The answer is **f**, despite what your residency instructors said. No specialty is most important. Medicine is far too advanced and far too complex for any of us to do this thing alone. The human body is a machine that requires not a caretaker, but a team of caretakers.

We hear lots about primary care being unrespected, underpaid and under-represented. And unfortunately, it is all of those! We should do a better job for all of those struggling in primary care offices, who get slighted and dumped-on left and right. But then, emergency medicine sees the lion's share of the uninsured, so we need some love. And general surgeons do gross surgeries on drugged-out crack heads. And neurosurgeons care for helmetless drunks from motorcycle wrecks, and obstetricians deliver high risk babies to moms who figured out they were delivering while Salsa dancing.

We all have unique skills and interests. Primary care doctors aren't surgeons and aren't fond of draining appendiceal abscesses. Surgeons, with all their surgical skills, seldom have the patience to manage Aunt Lucy's hypertension or urinary incontinence, or the head-lice outbreak in the Jones family. Cardio-thoracic surgeons and pediatric psychiatrists are worth their weight in gold, but you just can't get them to deliver a baby for anything! Emergency physicians will get your airway and stabilize your poisoning, but we have attention spans of racoons (whom we sometimes resemble in the correct light). Pediatricians love children, and treat them wonderfully, but they simply hate interpreting MRI's of the lumbar spine!

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The thing is, we all have a place. And for that reason, we all owe one another respect. Note that this does NOT mean everyone has to be paid the same amount! Some specialties are more stressful, some specialties necessarily more rare. Some require painfully long residencies and some are relative 'walks in the park.' Pay them all a low-end common denominator and the quality of physicians will sink and we'll all be going to the vet when we need a CT scan or an antibiotic. Or a flea-dip.

So go forth with respect for all. They probably couldn't do what you do. Nor could you do what they do. At least not happily.

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