



## Is it worth it?

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Dear Editor,

We think all Italian doctors have been concerned by the advertising that is recently going on the Italian television networks which promise the victims of “medical mistakes” a “correct revenge” and a more than “adequate compensation” [1].

Some of us are young, others less so but we all have to admit, however, that we can hardly picture peacefully the future years of our medical careers. We think that those who have chosen our profession have done it primarily to help people, to try to cure and soothe the patient’s suffering. Studying medicine is still a heavy choice for a young student: the sleepless nights on the books, the endless shifts during the training, spending holidays at work, and so on. Nevertheless, we did it because we felt it would be worth it.

Every time we feel sad and frustrated, we can always focus on some special moments that help us to go on; the thankful last words of a 40-year-old dying mother make us realize that, even if we have not been able to cure her, we were undoubtedly taking care of her, relieving her suffering. Yes, it was worth it.

On the other side, facing the violence and suspicion of people influenced by the social media, we ask ourselves many questions and then the doubt rises in our mind. Is it really worth it?

In our daily routine, we stick to good practice guidelines and EBM but we must never forget how our job is primarily a mission. Our profession is something ancestral and magical, as Abraham Verghese, Professor of Internal Medicine at Stanford University, sustained for years [2]. The physical examination, the cornerstone of the medical behaviour, is

more like a ritual than a scientific process, allowing us to approach the patient and really get close with his physicality, his pain and his fears. but this involves a high emotional commitment too.

Every day we cope with pain and misery in an endless sequence of more and more complicated requests for help. Physical and mental exhaustion, the daily involvement in suffering, the complexity of clinical cases, and the lack of unique solutions are concerns we have to face with routinely.

Moreover, time for discussion among colleagues is increasingly limited and this intellectual loneliness necessarily hesitates in even more troubles to handle. In this context, making mistakes and dealing with them become an inevitable part of our job. On the other side, facing with medical mistakes is virtually unacceptable for a patient and the consequences can be devastating for both the patient and the doctor. How many wonderful doctors, full of enthusiasm and passion for their profession, have made a mistake that has turned upside down their life and led to a sense of guilt, fear, frustration and failure? How many enthusiastic doctors every day fail to take care of their patient even if they put all their dedication and humanity? Doctor Google never had (and we hope it will never do so) to tell a father that his son is dead or a husband that the love of his whole existence has a few weeks left. Those who are ready to bring us to court are aware of what all this means? Do they really understand the passion and commitment involved in our practice?

Sometimes we really fear that our vocation of doctor may break (Fig. 1).

All this feeling makes us think that perhaps we should rebuild our relationship with patients, make them feel our closeness but also our feelings and difficulties. We have to take off our scrubs, which unfortunately sometimes keeps us far from our patients and sit beside them on the edge of the bed telling them the truth in a human and non-technical way.

Is it worth doing our job in 2019? Let us prevent our fear to steal all these moments: it would have devastating consequences. We must continue to transmit to our young colleagues the passion for this exciting “adventure”. The enthusiasm of solving an unsolvable case or a difficult surgery

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**Fig. 1** The “vocation’s break”

should not obscure the “other side of the moon”; with this same passion, we have to face the easy and common case or the one who is hopeless and full of suffering. All of these for that very sweet “thank you”, or just because it is the right thing to do.

We have no absolute recipes, but a good starting point could be to reach for a greater understanding of ourselves, to stand for the time to share, discuss and listen, with more humility. Finally, let us remember that whatever our role and

our field is, we all carry the same noble and unique mission of care.

Yes, it is worth it.

### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Statement of human and animal rights** This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

**Informed consent** For this type of study formal consent is not required.

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