



## EDITORIAL

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# Introducing the VA Boston Medical Forum

*He who studies medicine without books sails an uncharted sea, but he who studies medicine without patients does not go to sea at all.*

—William Osler, MD

The case history has been the cornerstone of clinical learning since the first record of medical encounters in ancient Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The methodical process of taking a patient history by Hippocratic physicians enabled an empirical approach to medicine centuries before the scientific revolution. From Freud in psychiatry to Giovanni Morgagni in pathology—case reports have been the time-honored and time-tested vehicle for teaching medicine.<sup>2</sup>

Most American physicians grew up reading the most famous modern series of histories, the “Case Records of the Massachusetts General Hospital,” published in that pinnacle of medical scholarship, *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Now, also from Boston, I’m proud to announce that *Federal Practitioner* has its own case series, The VA Boston Medical Forum (HIV-Positive Veteran With Progressive Visual Changes, page 18).

The VA Boston Medical Forum is a printed (and electronic, these days) version of the case conferences held at the flagship VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS), which has academic affiliations with the Boston Medical Center, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Brian Hoffman, professor emeritus

at Harvard Medical School, who previously served as the chief of internal medicine at the VABHS, founded the series, which has continued for more than 10 years.

The didactic driving force of this medical forum are the VABHS chief medical residents and their director of residency education. It is—as you will see in this issue—a case report taken from a weekly multidisciplinary conference. We feel the authors have captured much of the interactive ambience of those case conferences, including laboratory values, medical images, extensive references, and takeaway points, as though you were there at morning rounds.

Each case involves a VA patient and presents in traditional case history format a discussion of the diagnosis and treatment of a challenging patient. Just as they do at the actual case conferences, the chief medical residents moderate these discussions, which also feature expert opinions from nationally recognized leaders in their respective medical specialties.

From the many cases they present, the chief medical residents and their director of residency education will select cases that focus on clinical problems relevant to those caring for veterans, such as homelessness, comorbid substance use disorders, along with thought provoking and complex medical presentations that will test the clinical reasoning of the most experienced diagnostician.

Over many years as a medical

educator, I have come to believe that whether it is ethics or surgery, we all learn best from an interesting case history and a good medical mystery. We hope to provide both in this conversational, question-and-answer format. Think back to your days on the wards: You can have all that intellectual stimulation without the night call and “pimping.” So from the comfort of your favorite reading spot, we invite you to sit back and enjoy. This is continuing medical education at its best, and I am proud to welcome our readers to the inaugural case of what we at *Federal Practitioner* hope will be an enduring feature. We thank the authors of the Boston Medical Forum for their dedication to enhancing VA academic medicine and, most important, helping us all to be smarter caregivers for our veterans. ●

### Author disclosures

*The author reports no actual or potential conflicts of interest with regard to this article.*

### Disclaimer

*The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Federal Practitioner, Frontline Medical Communications Inc., the U.S. Government, or any of its agencies.*

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2. Nuland SB. *Doctors: The Biography of Medicine*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1988.