

MED 535 B Lecture 6
Lecture 6: Professionalism, Ethics, and Patient Safety.

At a glance.

Phase 1:
Professional Values & Ethics
(Principles, Confidentiality, Capacity)

→

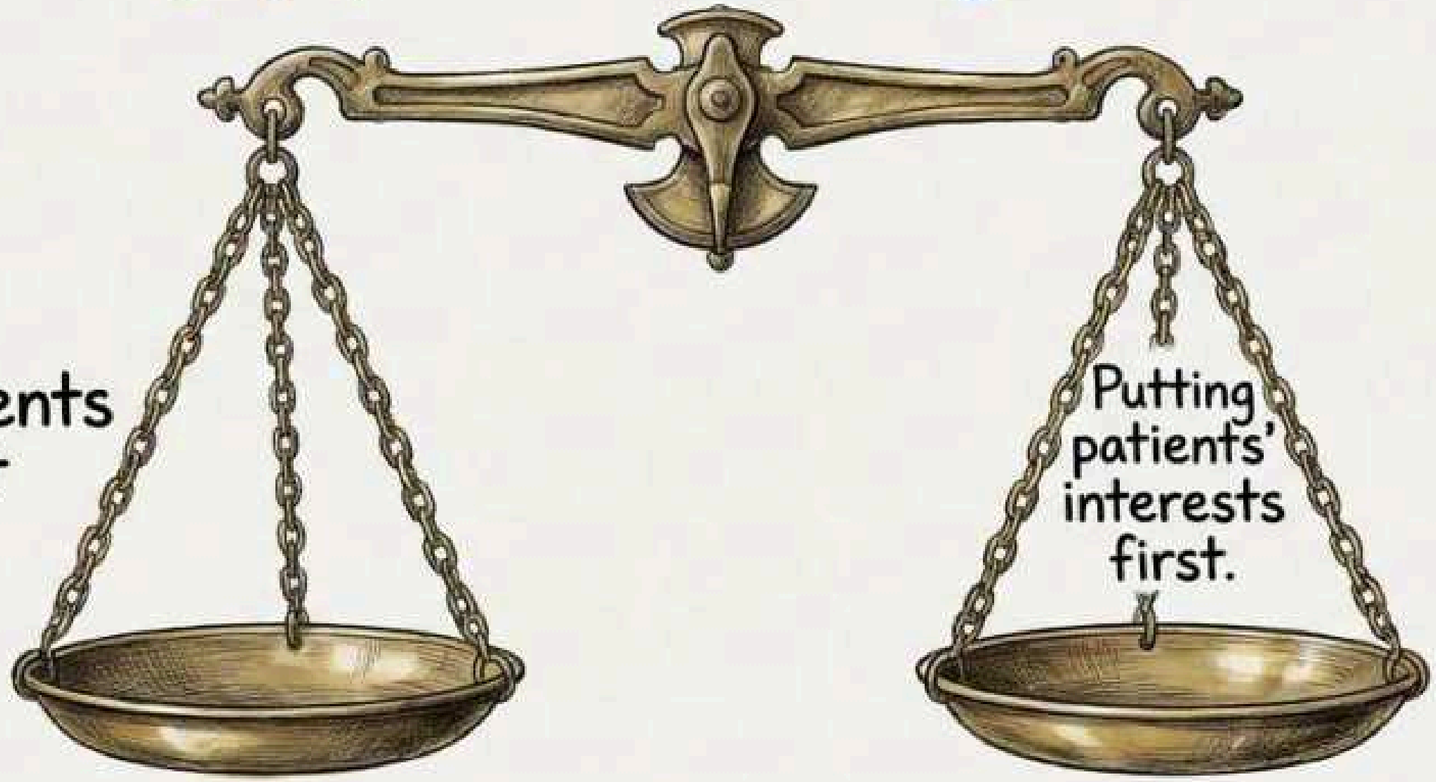
Phase 2:
Patient Safety & Systems
(Error, The Swiss Cheese Model)

→

Phase 3:
Culture, Communication, and Clinician Care
(Speaking Up, Burnout)

Trust = f(Special Knowledge, Vulnerability)

Special knowledge + Access to patients at their most vulnerable.



Core Values Derived from the Hippocratic Oath:

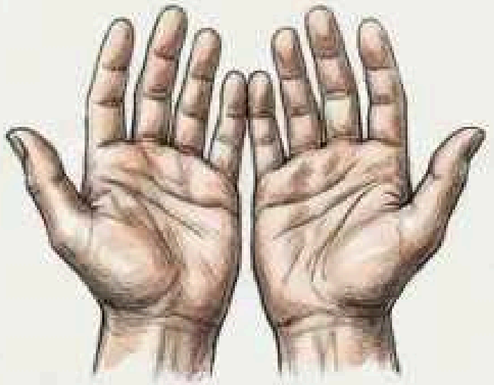
☑ Competence ☑ Honesty ☑ Respect ☑ Confidentiality ☑ Fairness

Beauchamp & Childress (1979) Framework of Medical Ethics

¶6.2



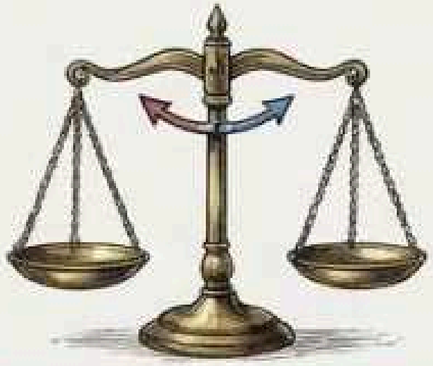
Autonomy:
Honouring patients' informed choices.



Beneficence:
Acting in the patient's best interests.



Non-maleficence:
Avoiding harm.



Justice:
Treating people fairly & distributing resources fairly.

The Clinical Reality:
Real cases often involve complex tensions and contradictions between these four principles.



Confidentiality → Trust → Disclosure of necessary information. (Without privacy, patients withhold vital facts).

IF Consent is given by patient

IF Required by Law

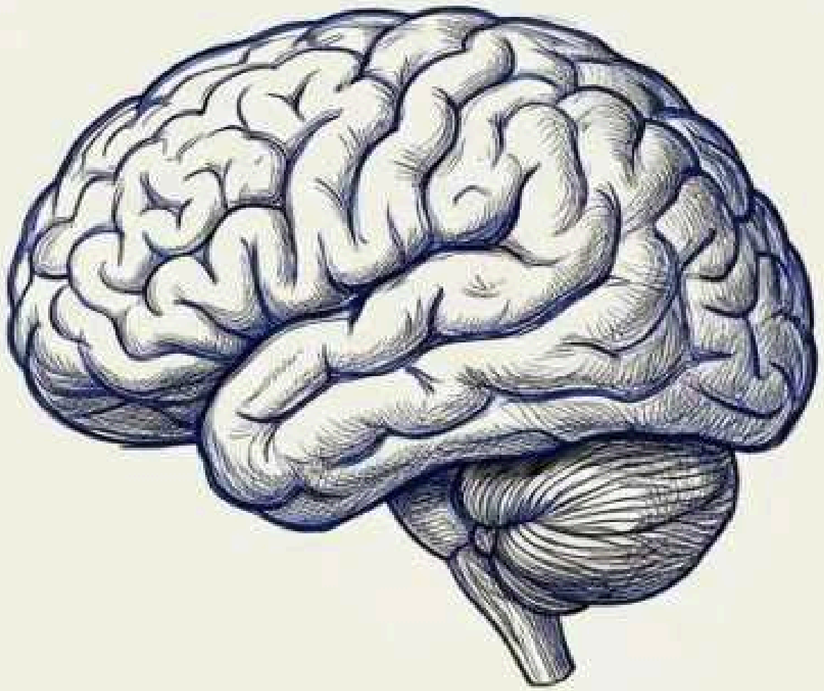
IF Risk of serious harm to others

THEN → Break confidentiality.

...and then ONLY as far as strictly necessary.

Capacity = U × R × W × C

¶ 6.4



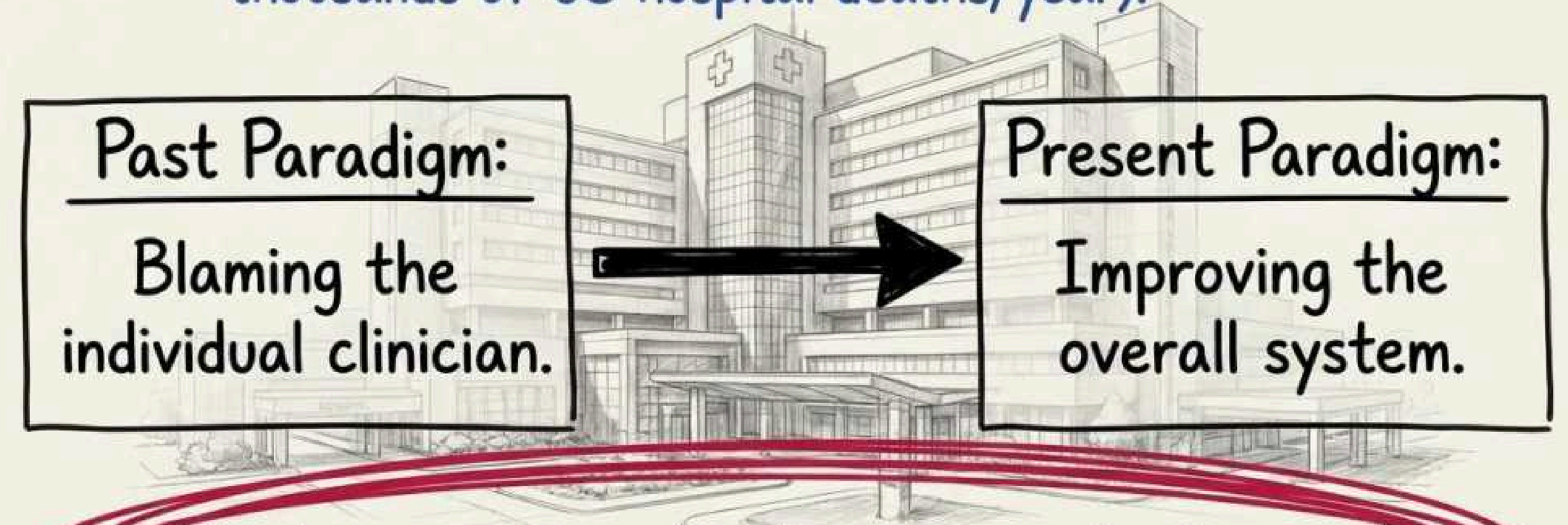
Understand relevant information
Retain the information
Weigh the options
Communicate the decision

Capacity is decision-specific. It is a function of time (t) and the specific decision (d). It can change over time.

Key Theorems:

- Presumed present in all adults unless shown otherwise.
- Unwise decision =/= Lack of capacity.
- If Capacity = 0 → Decisions made in best interests, taking account of known wishes.

Catalyst: 1999 US Institute of Medicine Report: To Err Is Human (Revealed medical errors caused tens of thousands of US hospital deaths/year).



Past Paradigm:

Blaming the individual clinician.

Present Paradigm:

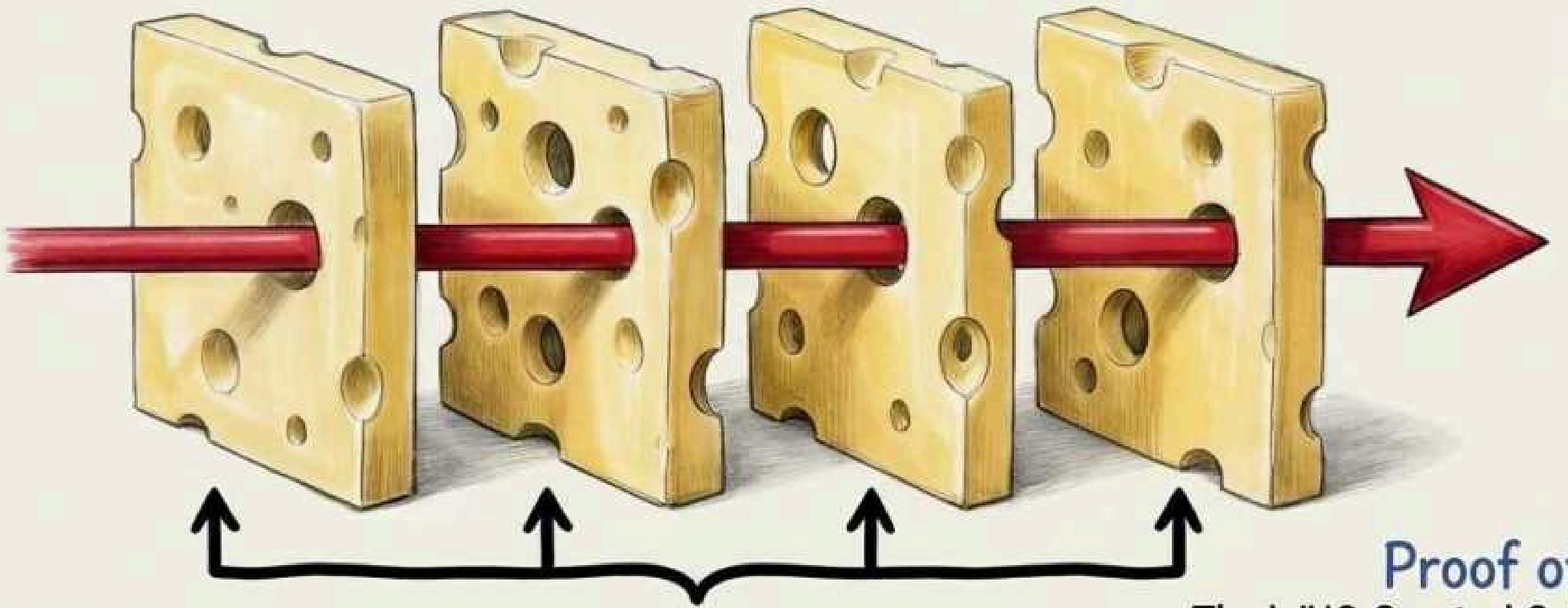
Improving the overall system.

Most errors occur when competent people work in flawed systems.

The Swiss Cheese Model of Harm (James Reason).

¶ 6.6

The Mechanism: Harm occurs when holes in several layers of defence align so an error passes through all of them.



Layer Fortification (How to shrink the holes):
Checklists, double checks, clear labelling, good handovers.

Proof of Concept:
The WHO Surgical Safety Checklist (tested 2009) demonstrably reduced deaths and complications after surgery by formalizing these layers.

Common Vectors of Harm

- Medication errors
- Hospital-acquired infections
- Falls
- Pressure sores
- Blood clots
- Diagnostic errors

The Hand Hygiene Equation:



Championed by Ignaz Semmelweis (1840s) regarding childbed fever.

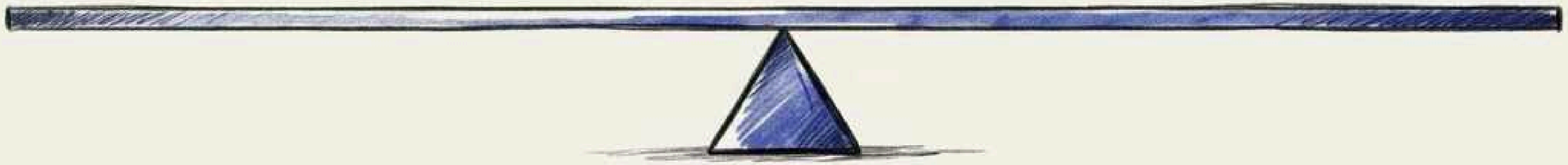
$$\text{Hand Washing} \propto \frac{1}{\text{Mortality}}$$

Clinical Reality Check: Remains one of the most effective safety measures, yet compliance remains imperfect.

Encouraging reporting of errors/near misses for system learning

Just Culture Spectrum

Holding individuals accountable for reckless behaviour



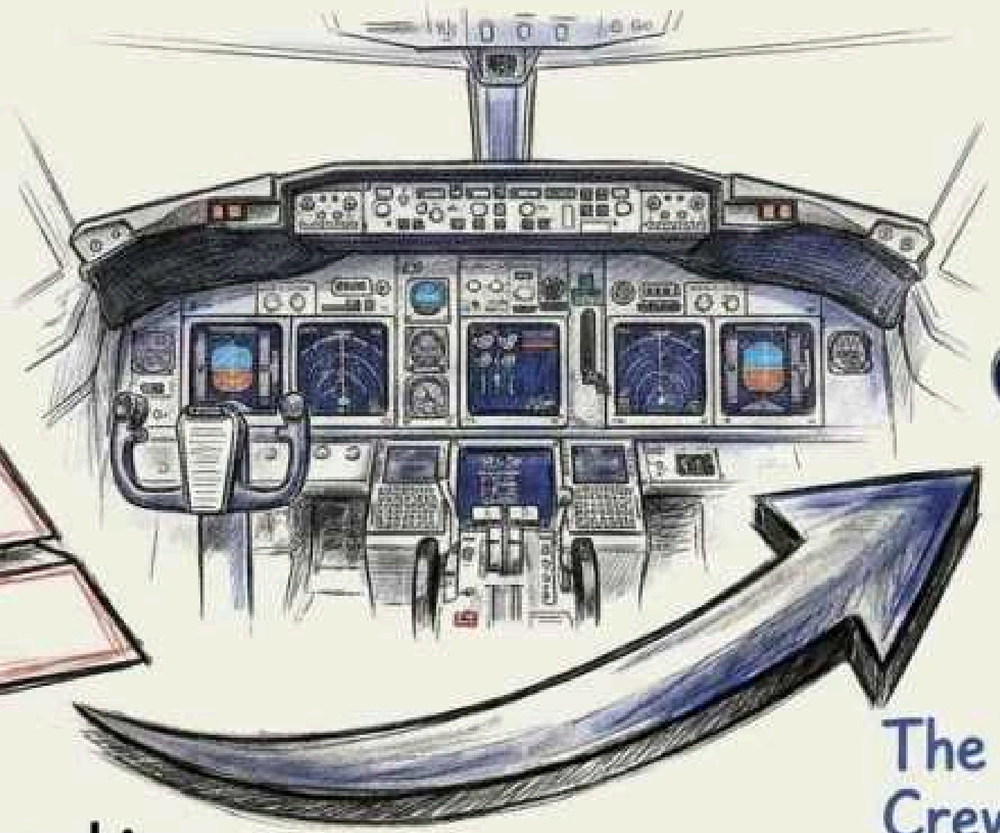
The Formal Duty of Candour: When harm occurs, the systemic response must equal:

Honest
+ Prompt
+ Apology
+ Explanation

+ Action Plan (to prevent recurrence)









The Problem: Strict hierarchies make junior staff reluctant to question seniors.

The Solution:
Crew Resource Management (lessons adapted from aviation). Make it normal for anyone to raise a concern.

Safety = Flatter Hierarchy + Clear, Direct Language

Speaking up is a core safety skill.

Caring for clinicians is a subset of Caring for patients.
(They are inseparable).

¶ 6.10





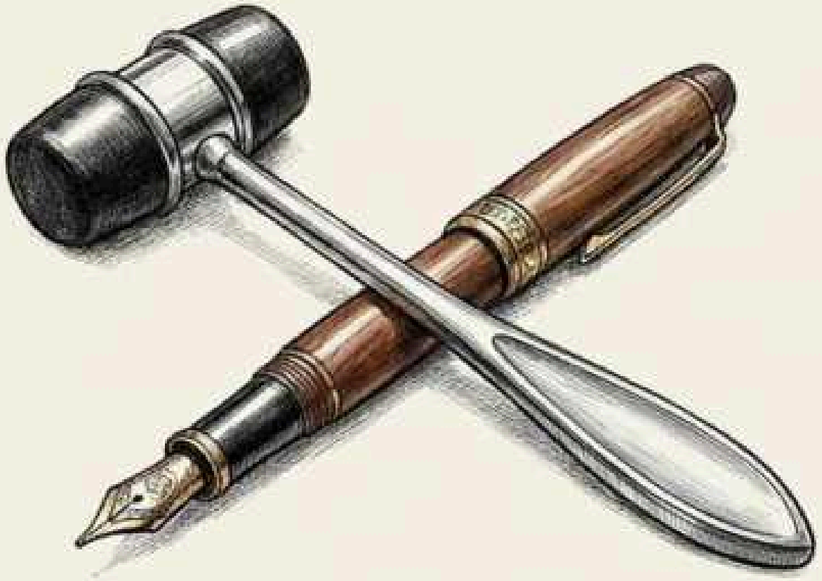
The Burnout Triad =

+ Exhaustion
+ Detachment
+ Reduced Sense of Accomplishment

The Impact: Correlates directly with medical errors and lower quality of care.

The Antidote (Systemic, not just individual):
Reasonable workloads + Supportive teams + Access to help without stigma.

The Foundations for Clinical Clerkships (Synthesis)



- ☐ Listen to patients (and let them finish).
- ☐ Examine with respect and purpose.
- ☐ Reason: consider both what is likely AND what must not be missed.
- ☐ Interpret tests in light of pretest probability.
- ☐ Share decisions honestly.
- ☐ Protect confidentiality & respect capacity.
- ☐ Build safe systems.

Feedback/Questions:
garyanderson at mail dot grokbot dot com

X (Twitter):
@garyanderson