

Persuading the Medical Community

In the ever changing world of medicine, the relationship between the doctor and the patient is often times overlooked. In “Leech, Leech, Et Cetera”, Lewis Thomas describes how patient care has developed over the years. By referencing how meanings of medical words have changed, Thomas demonstrates that the medical profession is also transforming. Doctors are slowly losing their ability to have personal relationships with their patients and as a result are depending solely on machines to do the work. He even goes as far as to say that a doctor’s job no longer involves treating the patient but instead with “looking after machines” (60). In “Leech, Leech, Et Cetera”, Thomas uses his knowledge of the evolution of medical words’ meanings to trigger the reader’s emotions in hopes of changing how physicians and medical students treat their patients by suggesting that the once personal doctor to patient relationship has taken a negative turn.

Thomas begins his essay by describing how certain words have gone from a positive to a much more negative connotation. The credibility of the essay is well established by his intelligent tone. Thomas’ way of persuasion may not be the most unique, but the logic behind his thinking should grab the audience’s attention. Showing how “leech the doctor...[carries] the implication of knowledge and wisdom,” Thomas accurately states how the medical profession was once viewed (53). Doctors were people of high intelligence and trusted among all. Looked up to and admired, “Medicine was once the most respected of all the professions” (54). Thomas then examines the other side of the word leech referring to the worm. Words like “blood” and “tax collectors” are associated with this form (53). Giving the term an immediate negative meaning, Thomas convinces the audience that the medical profession is going in the same

direction. By pointing this out, Thomas hopes to persuade physicians and medical students to return medicine to how it used to be.

Along with the change of word meanings, Thomas also appeals to the readers' emotions by describing what the family doctor used to be like. By bringing up the point that "touching was the real professional secret," patients used to feel that the doctors treating them really did care about more than just healing the disease (56). Now though, "the doctor can perform a great many of his most essential tasks from his office in another building without ever seeing the patient" (57). Thomas tries to show doctors just how much their profession has changed and how it is affecting their patients. Patients are no longer a top priority and feel less important because doctors are "wholly concerned with treating the disease" (58). Triggering the reader's emotions is a smart strategy for Thomas if he really wants a change to occur. It makes the audience feel more attached to the issue and more involved and also makes them care what the outcome of the situation will be.

In addition to his logical and emotional appeals, Thomas' word choice helps him convince doctors and medical students that they must change how they treat patients. The fact that he uses "leech" in comparison to a doctor and "dehumanizing" to describe "how they are trained" immediately gives a negative impression of medical practice (53, 55). The latter phrase suggests that doctors are no longer able to relate to their patients. Also, when describing the new medical technology, Thomas' tone is extremely cold and impersonal, just as the new equipment is. These words are effective in the sense that Thomas' audience is able to pick up on the downside of the current medical world.

It is clear that the medical profession is viewed very differently today than it used to be, and that the sacred doctor to patient relationship has been lost. His points could convince any

medical student to reevaluate their motives for joining the profession and how they will treat their future patient. Thomas then brings up a very important point. He states that today, “many patients go home speedily, in good health, cured of their diseases” (59). However, back in the time of the family doctor who knew the pet’s name, “this happened much less often, and when it did, it was a matter of good luck or strong constitution” (59). This one point alone makes the purpose of his essay hard to take in. Thomas looks down on technology when clearly that is the reason for the higher success rates. Although a personal relationship with the physician makes the patients feel important, without the advances in medicine, their chances for being cured decrease.

Overall, Thomas has a persuasive essay in terms of changing how physicians treat their patients and showing how the medical profession has taken a negative turn. He does a nice job convincing the audience to modify how they act through emotional and logical appeals, but after one crucial statement, his motive can be questioned. Why would doctors change how they are acting when the number of patients being healed is increasing? Although the medical professions are changing, it may not necessarily be for the worse. The close doctor to patient relationship may be gone, but patients may not even want this kind of relationship to start with. Patients, like doctors, are concerned with a cure.

Works Cited

Thomas, Lewis. “Leech, Leech, Et Cetera.” The Youngest Science: Notes of a Medicine-Watcher. New York: The Viking Press, 1983. 51-60.