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Thoughts on intensive care: from morphine to Merlyn and Tolstoy to television

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The heritage of intensive care medicine is passing from the first generation of intensivists, who began practicing in the 1960s and 1970s, to the next generation of practitioners. Passing this torch involves instruction not simply about medical facts and technical know-how, but about judgment, conduct, and interactions with patients, ICU staff, and other physicians as well as with society as a whole. Such instruction is essential to any sense of professional continuity.

Computers and other technology unknown to the first generation of intensivists are currently revolutionizing patient care, but are simultaneously threatening to dehumanize the intensive care environment. In the midst of such tumultuous progress it is essential to remind critical care practitioner that medicine is as much art as it is science, and that the ICU should remain a place to observe and practice that art. The 100 points presented as electronic supplementary material are submitted to intensivists, old and young, as guideposts to practicing that art in the ICU. The reader may find fault with some points and disagree with others, but the intent of each point is to recall the ancient dictum of Hippocrates, no less important today than it was 2500 years ago: "Where there is love of man, there is also love of the art."