

Secretary of State
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Illustrious Professor,

The Holy Father has been informed that on this coming 16th-17th of February, an international conference will be held in Rome on the subject "*Communication and relationships in Medicine: New Perspectives for Medical Etichette,*" promoted by the Medicine Dialogue Communion Association, in collaboration with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. The Supreme Pontiff has delegated me to express his appreciation for this undertaking and gladly extends his cordial greetings to the organizers, speakers and the numerous participants.

The chosen topic is particularly important for contemporary Medicine, which is ever more subject to manipulations, to threats of altering its specific nature, which is that of knowledge at the service of the sick, and his or her physical and spiritual suffering. The fulcrum, indispensable to this important activity, is the dimension regarding relationships which takes place, first and foremost, between doctor and patient, but which considerably involves also the entire medical team, health structures or the home context and, not lastly, the family of the sick person.

The importance of the relational dimension in medical practice therefore derives from the central place it occupies in the medical profession itself, an importance endowed by the content of communication, which should always

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always be inspired by the truth and the skill of modulating it according to the particular and concrete capacity to withstand it on the part of the people who are directly interested and of those who are closest to them, especially in cases where the pain is more onerous and, therefore it becomes more difficult to give it a deeper meaning.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to identify the fullness of a person with his or her ability to communicate and to build relationships; this would deny those who do not have this capacity, the intrinsic and objective value of the human being in itself. As the venerated Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, this "kind of logic tends to identify personal dignity with the capacity for verbal, explicit and, in any case, tangible communication. Obviously, with such presuppositions, there is no room in the world for one who – like the unborn or the dying – is a structurally weak subject who seems to be totally at the mercy of other people, is radically dependent on them and is able to communicate only with the mute language of a profound symbiosis of affections" (no. 19).

The "new perspectives" which the title of the Congress refers to should therefore be read as a communication skill which puts the human being above all those false values imposed on us more and more by modern society: efficiency, productivity, autonomy.

Your endeavor is therefore accompanied by the hope of discovering new ways to achieve an ever growing authenticity of interrelationships in the world of Medicine – authenticity which demands giving of oneself totally in order to participate in and extend solidarity to the other person's suffering.

As the Holy Father offers these reflections, he expresses his best wishes for the Congress. With assurances of his prayerful remembrance he willingly imparts to the Congress participants, and in a particular way to the Medicine Dialogue Communion Association and to the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the University of the Sacred Heart, his Apostolic Blessing.

I also gladly unite my personal best wishes while taking this occasion to extend my most cordial greetings,

(Sgd.) Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone
Secretary of State