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COMMENTARY

Dr. Jack and Cheryl Taunton, Colleague, Friend, Healer

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Abstract

In this age of societal and political polarization a few individuals stand out with excellence secondary to their ability to manage the human condition. I would like to honour two such individuals in this regard, namely Jack and Cheryl Taunton. This tribute will be focused on my involvement with them as a clinician, managing patients including professional athletes, plus my own personal journey managing a serious health condition.

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Introduction

I have been asked to write a tribute in recognition of the contributions made to the field of sports medicine by Dr. Jack Taunton and his wife Cheryl Taunton. I am humbled by Dr. Taunton's many achievements with respect to publications, awards and service in clinical care. I am also acutely aware that others will address his accomplishments and achievements in more detail.

Therefore, in pondering this request, I have chosen to write about this couple's dedication to the human condition. I will speak to this from the viewpoint of being an Orthopedic surgical colleague as well as the Vancouver Grizzlies team orthopedic surgeon while Jack was the primary care sports medicine team physical during the team's tenure in Vancouver 1995-2000.

Let me begin by stating that I first came in contact with Dr. Taunton when I was a fellow in Orthopedics at the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Clinic in 1997 under the auspices of Drs. McConkey, Davidson, and Hawkins. As we are all aware, Drs. Taunton and Clement started the sports clinic and were celebrated clinicians when I arrived. However, when introduced I was more struck by Jack's humble nature and self-effacing personality that put the clinic and the patient's first. In addition, he knew my background and had something good to say about Sudbury, my home town! WOW!

I returned on staff as an Orthopedic Surgeon at UBC in 1990 and on my first clinic day I remember meeting up with Dr. Taunton, who welcomed me with open arms with the line "Have we got a lot of patients for you to see!" "Let's get started!"

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From that point on our 30-year relationship began.

As an orthopedic surgeon the quality of the referral is everything. Jack not only sent detailed referral letters but most times, he would insist on personally discussing the patient with you as if they were a long-lost friend or family relative. This is how he treated all of his patients. Over the years, I saw him interact with residents, fellows, PhD students, physiotherapists, and nursing staff alike. He treated all with the utmost respect and had the uncanny ability to know one thing special about each person such that they felt special not only to him but to everyone (like the Sudbury comment.) The fostering of this utmost collegial experience at the sports medicine clinic, spear headed and mentored by Jack, is in my mind and is what made the clinic a special place to work.

I was asked by Dr. Ross Davidson to help him manage the Orthopedic injuries for the Vancouver Grizzlies basketball team inaugurated in 1995. The primary care sports medicine physician was Jack. We got to know each other on a personal level going to forty games per year, plus the yearly physician/player combine every year in Chicago. It was Jack, not myself that team management wanted present at all times for his superior decision-making ability. He had the ability to synthesize physical attributes plus inherent player behavioral characteristics in order to get the most out of the limited talent we were afforded through the draft at that time.

During one combine meeting, I was performing a physical examination of the right knee of one player and Jack began to physically examine the opposite knee. When asked what he was doing he quipped, "Bill, I'm just seeing for myself, what his normal knee function's like first!" That was

classic Jack, thorough, one step ahead, but respectful of me as well.

Jack's respect for the human condition augmented his excellence in patient care. His history and physical examinations were so thorough that one could never argue the validity of his conclusions. However, what really set him apart was the way he discussed the injury and the recovery aspect. This especially pertained to professional athletes from foreign countries, including the United States.

Jack has the total confidence of the players in part due to his clinical skill but also as a result of his dedication to providing the best possible orthopedic care through diligence that the players could never imagine. He not only went to all home games, he also attended almost ALL home practices! They were instructed by Jack to call him with any concerns. He advised the athletes on diet, self-directed motivation techniques, weightlifting, through to management of their family life.

When the Vancouver Grizzlies invited Jack to become their primary care sports medicine physician, they did not realize that they got a two for one deal. Cheryl Taunton, his beloved wife, also took on the job mentoring the players' families alongside Jack. On one memorable occasion the team chose Grouse mountain for their annual Christmas party. The evening was beautiful, when one exited the gondola they were met with large snowflakes in a Winter Wonderland. The players and wives marveled at the side and one wife remarked, "Cheryl, you told us this place was beautiful and you were indeed correct!"

It is well known that Cheryl is the reason why Jack has been so successful. She has always presented herself as a very calm, non-judgmental, articulate advocate for any task at hand. What many however, do

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not realize is how hard she works for whatever cause that presents itself to her. This includes everything from Jack's health, organizing yet another BC FunRun, Olympic games medical coverage, to managing office affairs at the sports medicine clinic. Through it all, Jack and Cheryl have raised two beautiful, accomplished daughters who are both able to appropriately manage their professional/family lives, as an Orthopedic Surgeon (Kristen) and University Professor (Carla).

I must end with a personal story about my own health. I suffered a major heart attack in 2013. I was admitted for open heart surgery at Vancouver General Hospital. It was touch and go. In order to focus on my mental preparation for complicated surgery as well as to come to terms with my own mortality, I did not allow non-family visitors except one, Jack Taunton.

Jack was able to put in perspective what I was facing and provided me the encouragement plus mental fortitude to see me through the surgery and more importantly the rehabilitation, which would allow me to get back to my family, to my work, and to my life. He visited me daily in the hospital through this 4-week ordeal. I credit Jack with providing me the positive mental attitude and other indescribable tools. I will never forget his influence at that time, I know Jack was ideal for this as I had seen him treat everyone in the same calm reassuring manner backed up by excellent medical knowledge and clinical perspective. I was first Jack's colleague but suddenly I was now his patient. That was one of the best decisions I have ever made. He did not treat me any differently in either role. But that is Jack, a true professional!

In summary, Jack is an icon in sports medicine. But he is more than that, he

really is a "horse whisperer" in medicine. Well done Jack! I wish you and Cheryl the very best in your future endeavors. I am extremely gratified to have known you both as people and Jack as a colleague, and as my personal physician.

Wayne Gretzky scored over 2000 goals and you have seen over 2000 patients. Different game... Same results!

Author's Qualifications

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