

**What medical advance do you most anticipate?**

Gene therapy.

**What is your most marked characteristic?**

My grittiness, passion, and perseverance.

**What do you most value in your colleagues?**

Hard work and dedication.

**What are your favorite books?**

Nonfiction: anything by Brené Brown.

Fiction: anything by Mitch Albom.

**What is your greatest regret?**

Anytime when I could have been kinder and offered more grace.

**What is the proudest moment of your career?**

All the moments when the people I've served have said they felt heard. And being awarded the University of Alberta Rising Star Alumni Award and the Resident Doctors of Canada Mikhael Award for Medical Education.

**What is your motto?**

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do."

—Edward Everett Hale

**How would you like to die?**

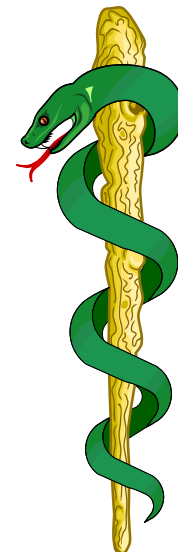
Old. Worn-out from a fully lived life. At peace.



# Symbols of medicine

Deriving meaning and encountering misunderstandings.

James D. Warren, MD



**L**ogo: a symbol or sign; derived from the Greek *logos*, meaning *word*; and designed to represent, at a glance, whatever it purports to represent. Today, thousands of symbols are used as logos, but they are often so graphically simplified that they no longer resemble the source. A symbol can identify a product, idea, company, profession, or activity, and once a logo becomes established, it is often recognized despite being disconnected from its source idea. Symbols can also hold power, based on what they represent.

The rod of Asclepius is the historically correct symbol of the medical profession and is employed worldwide. Asclepius was the Greek god of medicine or healing. The rod

is often depicted as a fat club being held by Asclepius with a single snake, gentle and benign, wrapped around it, consistent with gentle healing and idealized medicine.

The wand of Hermes, also called the caduceus, was a symbol that, for a time, mistakenly represented the medical profession in the United States. The wand consists of a winged staff with two snakes wound around it. Hermes was the god of commerce and many other things—travel, luck, fertility, animal husbandry, sleep, language, and thieves. It was an unfortunate choice for a logo for medicine (it was eventually jettisoned), and it isn't altogether clear why the US chose to use the more elaborate but clearly inaccurate caduceus for a time to represent the idealized physician.

The Canadian Medical Association's logo is now designed with a straight line, tapered at the bottom, with a snake loosely twisted around it. The American Medical Association has adopted a similar symbol for its logo—a straight line, on a slant, with a snake coiled around it, much like a spring.

Whether to portray a serpent as a squiggle or a spring is moot. Both associations agreed a stroke line is suitable for a club, and both logos morphed from using clear symbols to cryptic ones. Regardless, we still try to symbolize that medicine, at its best, is widely separated from commerce, though that may be a false hope sometimes. Hermes, god of commerce, is still at the door. ■

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*Dr Warren practised orthopaedic surgery in Victoria for 38 years, retiring in 2001. He obtained his MD from the University of Manitoba in 1957, an MSc in anatomy and a minor in classics from the University of British Columbia in 1960, and an FRCSC in 1963. In 2013 he gave the Listerian Oration to the Victoria Medical Society and the Osler Lecture to the Vancouver Medical Society on early Greek practices and theories of medicine. He was a member of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia for 12 years.*

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