

One paradox is that though the United States is the best place in the world in which to have a serious illness . . . it is one of the worst countries in the world in which to have a non-serious illness.

Because as actionists, who feel more comfortable doing something and having something done to us, we impose our life-saving drugs and techniques, intended for serious ailments, on minor, even trivial illness — illnesses that are self-limited and that, except for occasional symptomatic relief, do better without interference from the physician. (It is generally recognized that America is the most over-medicated, most over-operated, and most over-inoculated country in the world. It is also the most anxiety-ridden country with regard to health).

. . . Medicine as it is . . . the surgeon is the top man. He is the one you practically enjoy paying because he is "doing something" to you, if not for you. He is doing things you can feel and see and talk about, and this is something that our activist culture can readily appreciate . . . The patient generally is too impatient to give nature a chance.

Today, people are not happy about paying the wise doctor who recommends that you do nothing because you have a self-limited disease. They think he has not really earned a fee because they haven't seen him do anything; they have just heard him say a few words.

The patient wants the physician to be active on an heroic scale and the physician does not disdain this role.

(Interview of Herbert Ratner, M.D.,
by Donald McDonald, originally
published in 1962, reprinted in
The Center Magazine, May 1969)