

family practice doctor because the latter is given too little training in inpatient care and acute conditions to be considered for the former specialization. She did choose to take the family practice route anyway, because it allows the doctor to provide more continuity in care, and therefore to experience the patient as something more like an actual person. This is the model of care practiced with more frequency in the developing countries in which she would like to eventually practice. Though both doctors and medical school are numerous, the curriculum needs to be standardized, so the boards which control these things are forced to tightly define the scope of a given degree and then to deliver education in prepackaged doses.

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Our last panelist walked us through a case study of the syndrome known as Beriberi, which devastated Asia and (crucially) Dutch economic interests there in the 19th century. The case was interesting in that researchers were so focused on isolating the responsible microbe that they failed to consider that Beriberi might not have been caused by a microbe at all. In fact, the syndrome was caused by a nutritional deficiency, and while one might think this would be *obvious* to the researchers after they discovered that chickens (and later, prisoners) eating a diet without rice hulls were much more likely to display the symptoms than those eating the same diet *with* rice hulls, but in fact researchers concluded that the hulls must contain some *antitoxin* and continued searching for some responsible bacterium for *decades*.

So again, this is instructive in the power of narrative to order, to make sense of, reality. Even with a relatively sophisticated conception of empirical method, the process of inquiry into the nature of Beriberi still consisted in *looking for data that fit the theories*, rather than vice versa.

In other words, the scientific community was newly enamored of the “germ theory,” as a relatively new and sophisticated understanding of disease, one which had revolutionized medicine and enabled great successes in controlling historically devastating diseases. Little wonder, then, the impulse to rely on the germ theory as a *narrative framework* to order the phenomena of all disease. “When all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.”

Professor Taylor understood that if we were already familiar with the nature of Beriberi, then the missteps of the original researchers might seem foolishly obvious, but by choosing to present the case in a format that forced us to stop and consider what conclusions we would have drawn given the same evidence, he revealed that the process of inquiry can be fairly overwhelming and that there *must* be (in the beginning) an interpretation of evidence according to some previously conceived theory. This is especially true regarding the mountain of circumstance which can be detailed regarding research conducted in society rather than in a sterile, controlled laboratory.

Mankind has been creating the story of disease for millennia, and this has called upon all our faculties. This process had become more sophisticated secondary to evolving technologies of inquiry and rationalization, and has in turn contributed to furthering such technologies, the greatest of which is the empirical method. Disease has been a constant, deadly, invisible presence the spread of which is (still) unpredictable but behind which has always lay a pattern which maddeningly we can catch only glimpses of, obscured as it is by chances of circumstance. The scientific (empirical) method has aided us in controlling for these chances and while neither it nor any technique can allow us to be completely objective in analyzing data, when adhered to

painstakingly it *will* reveal when the data cannot fit a given hypothesis and thereby force us to abandon a favored narrative in favor of another, perhaps even one that doesn't yet exist, as was the case for Beriberi researchers and the deficiency theory of disease. Thus creativity is forced upon us creatures of habit and comfort, and thereby shaken our notion of reality is ultimately advanced.

