

### III — TAKING THE MAGIC OUT OF MEDICINE

Throughout history doctors have been attacked on the grounds that they pretended to be cleverer than they were. The profession has had a ready answer to this by pointing out that its behaviour was conditioned by the demands of the patients.

The “doctor-patient relationship”, that sacred phrase with such powerful emotional overtones, is partly the product of the energy that has gone into the task of comforting people who are ill, frightened and anxious to be convinced that words, herbs or spells would cure them.

The human race surrounded medicine with magic because of its crying need, and one of the first lessons a doctor learns is that he's indispensable. Although his critics may have been right when they said that most of his science was bluff, he was only meeting the demand as best he could.

By convincing patients that his magic would work, he was helping to provide a cure : the physical effects of comfort and reassurance are badly understood but undeniable.

But whereas in the past the doctor was needed for what he *was*, to-day he is needed, more and more, for what he *does*.

The profession no longer needs to pretend: it really can cure and alleviate on a wide and predictable scale. Medicine still has large elements of confidence trickery (and probably always will) but its basis is increasingly scientific.

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