



Jesuit MDs: Walking with Ignatius on Their Medical Rounds

by William Bole

"I was ill and you cared for
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The name embroidered on his white coat reads “Myles N. Sheehan, SJ, MD,” but that’s not why many of his patients at a suburban Chicago hospital know he’s a Jesuit. They know the face. When Cardinal Francis George of Chicago was diagnosed with bladder cancer this past summer, it was Fr. Sheehan, in white collar and white coat, who stepped in front of television cameras at press conferences.

As Cardinal George’s personal physician, Fr. Sheehan (who doesn’t normally wear his clerical collar at the hospital because he says it could confuse patients) briefed reporters on the churchman’s bodily and spiritual condition. He reflected on how his illustrious patient was getting to know the Lord who accompanies us on journeys through disease and recovery.

Although he teaches and practices medicine at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Ill., where he is also a dean at the medical school, Fr. Sheehan belongs to the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. He is one of approximately 25 Jesuit physicians in the United States, and among a handful who have been assigned to their medical ministries by the New England Province.



Fr. John Siberski, SJ, MD

Like the cardinal's doctor, **Fr. John Siberski, SJ, MD**, specializes in geriatrics, though his field is psychiatry. He sees patients two days a week at Georgetown University Hospital, otherwise serving as associate professor of psychiatry and assistant dean for student life at Georgetown's medical school. He celebrates Mass regularly at both the school and the hospital chapel, and his bedside manner extends to hearing confession.

At 58, **Fr. Siberski** was one of three men ordained as Jesuits in the New England Province last June. He says he never knowingly met a Jesuit until 1989, while in Georgetown—that's Guyana, not Washington, D.C.

At the time, he had closed a family medical practice founded by his late father in Plymouth, Pa., and he was volunteering at a Sisters of Mercy hospital in Guyana, before beginning a psychiatric residency at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia. In Guyana, he got to know Jesuit chaplains and novices who were nurses' aides, working with them during the day, playing Scrabble with them at night.

"Looking back, what inspired me was their lived spirituality," the priest recalls, speaking of how these Jesuits carried the Ignatian spirit of service and friendship with them, whether in the hospital, at the altar or on the

rugby field. Three years later, he saw the same qualities in Jesuits working at Massachusetts General Hospital, where he pursued advanced psychiatric training.

Asked how the Ignatian spirit follows him on his medical rounds, Fr. Siberski mentioned something that had just happened that day. After 11 grueling hours at the hospital, the daughter of one of his Alzheimer's patients called to say her father had passed

out at a supermarket and was being rushed by ambulance to the emergency room. Fr. Siberski could have easily dispatched an intern to the ER, as many specialists do. But he said to himself at the time, "I know Ignatius is up there thinking, 'You better go over there.'" He did, and the patient was okay.

In moments like that, Fr. Siberski said he also hears the words of Jerome Nadal, a member of St. Ignatius's original band of brothers, who urged fellow Jesuits "to pray as if everything depended on God, and work as if everything depended on you."

In Chicago, Fr. Sheehan, 50, says he has buried more than a few of his geriatric patients, and he has anointed many of them during house calls that he makes in his "free time." Boston-born and ordained in 1994, Fr. Sheehan doesn't dwell on being a Jesuit physician, as distinct from any other sort of Jesuit.

"I love being a doctor, but I don't think this ministry is any more exciting than teaching high school," he said. "As Jesuits, we go all-out for the Lord and the Church, using the gifts that are given to us."



Fr. Sheehan and Fr. Siberski are two of many Jesuits working in the medical and healthcare fields. Visit www.sjnen.org to learn more.