

Letter to the Editor

Hawking Obituary

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“Look beneath the surface; let not the several quality of neither a thing nor its worth escape thee.”- *Marcus Aurelius* [1].

“Although I cannot move and I have to speak through a computer, in my mind I am free.” – *Stephen Hawking* [2].

Around the time when I heard the news about Stephen Hawking passing away, I was in Washington D.C. for a conference. I had taken a few extra days to see the museums around the city. I spent a somber and meditative day at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. One of the many topics that the museum educates the public on is the horrid history of the T4 program. The Nazi T4 program was a program of killing anyone with a physical or mental “disability” [3]. This was pseudoscience – both exceedingly foolish and profoundly evil. Many talented individuals would have fallen into the broad categories outlined in the T4 program if they had lived during that time and place [3,4,5,6].

Let us reflect on Stephen Hawking as an example of someone who was “disabled” but who was also truly talented and bestowed the fruits of those talents onto a grateful world. As Hawking’s physical capabilities deteriorated due to ALS, he turned all the more inward toward cultivating his immense cognitive talents [7]. This intense focus propelled him to the top of his field. He was admired by the public not only for his brilliance but also for his courage, humor, humanity, and heart [8,9]. As a leading “ambassador for science,” he inspired a new generation through his popular books [8,10]. He had a talent not only for the science of astrophysics but also in making the complex concepts of astrophysics accessible to the general public. He was a “rock-star” of science. In the media, he was also a human face of ALS, inspiring support for research into the condition [8]. His memorial arrangements included reimbursing the bill for an Easter Lunch at Wesley Methodist Church for 50 homeless Britons on the day of his funeral [9]. Stephen Hawking was both a man of science and a man of the people.

At the Holocaust Memorial Museum, there is a sign which reads “Think about what you saw.” As health science educators, let us seek to impart the need to see the person, not just the illness or other labels. See the person; don’t be blinded by a label [5].

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