Disaffected doctors are now, I have heard, a worldwide phenomenon. How can this be, given the satisfactions that the practice of medicine offers? Some say it is simply the burden of overwork; others, the microsupervisory and hyperaccountability culture of audit and appraisal; some even, the domination of our journals by impenetrable genetics and improbable epidemiology. The real reasons may be hard to identify, yet we may still be able to counteract them. Some medicines work even when we don't know why.

Let me tell you, if I may, about a trip that I made some time ago to see Jack. We had been exchanging letters for the past 10 years, ever since I had read his engaging biography of Samuel Johnson, the 18th-century English literary critic, lexicographer, and poet. I had been giving a dermatology lecture at Yale and found myself the next morning, in the snowbound New England of February 1994, boarding an Amtrak train for Boston.

The train had already been delayed by the heavy snowstorms then sweeping through the Northeast. The floor-level heating had broken down, and I had to lift my feet up onto the seat to stop them from losing all feeling. My nearest fellow passenger, a bulky black man, was similarly hunched up opposite, the space between us being occupied by stty: : No such device or address similarly:
Command not found an even bulkier, white double-bass case. As the train labored on, the sliding doors of our carriage were freezing in their runners and opening less and less widely at each station.

By the time we got to Back Bay, one stop from the end of the journey, my traveling companion could only just manage to squeeze himself out of the train, and his double-bass case could not be induced to follow. First the burly train conductor, and then half a dozen of us passengers were also needed before the doors could be pried far enough apart to get that case off the train. A huge cheer eventually erupted on the icy platform and we were on our way again.

Later, much later, in the day than originally planned, I finally entered Room 781 on the topmost floor of the comfortingly well-heated Widener Library at Harvard. Jack (Emeritus Professor Walter Jackson Bate) rose to meet me, a slender, slightly stooped man in his mid-70s, wearing a brown tweed jacket and an inquiring, yet kindly, smile. Brought together by a shared interest in the life and works of Samuel Johnson, there was still just time for us to scuttle across to the Johnson rooms of the Houghton Library. Here, the director of the library, Richard Wendorf, invited me to handle (without gloves!) an original Johnson manuscript. As the 3 of us pored over the attractive, though not always easily legible, handwriting of the great lexicographer, I imagined how this letter must have been treasured to have survived the past 2 centuries.

Jack then guided me through the snowdrifts to his nearby town house, where an evening had been arranged with Jim Basker, then associate professor and now professor of English at Barnard College, New York. Over our meal, we talked about Johnson and how grievously misrepresented he had been as a misogynist and a racist. Reading Johnson himself, rather than only Boswell's Life, brilliant biography though this is, was the best corrective. Johnson had in fact been a strong supporter of both women's rights and the abolition of slavery. Our conversation conjured up for me those that Johnson
had so much relished over meals with his contemporaries.

After the meal, talk turned to Jack's other home in Amherst, New Hampshire. Farming there had been a hobby for him, though he admitted to having been better at growing rocks than anything else. Jack then reached up to a nearby shelf for a green-covered *Collected* of the poet Robert Frost, who had also tried his hand at farming in New England. Prefacing each poem with his personal knowledge of its rural background, Jack read a few out loud. His reading of them made the poems resonate in the mind; as Frost had written, "The ear is the only true writer and the only true reader." One particular favorite of Jack's was "Come In," which ends in as many as 4 repetitions of rural Yankee negativism:

But no, I was out for the stars:

I would not come in.

I meant not even if asked,

And I hadn't been.

Ever since that evening, I've been able to hear those poems in my head and to read others by Frost with almost equal enjoyment.

Jack was concerned about my flight back to London scheduled for the next afternoon, and Jim generously offered to escort me to the airport by the Metro, since roads to Logan were likely by then to be either impassable or gridlocked. The weather news the next morning was grim and the airport was losing its battle to stay open. Jack was determined that I should experience something else yet though, and showed me over to the Poetry Room of the University Library. From the incredible collection there of recordings of poets, we listened through headphones to a just-audible Tennyson rhythmically chanting his own poetry. As the snow continued to tumble down past the library windows, I felt that I had been spirited back to a late-Victorian poetry reading.

Jack and I then said our somewhat anxious goodbyes, but Jim shepherded me over to Logan in no time on the Metro, and the runways reopened just in time for my flight to take off for Heathrow on time. It had been a struggle but, as Johnson had once written of a hard journey in the Scottish Highlands, "I should have been sorry to have missed any of the inconveniences, to have had more light, or less rain, for their cooperation crowded the scene, and filled the mind."

"Filled the mind" — that surely is a key to our professional well-being. Whether it be, as here, the stimulation of great writing and writers, or cultivating a medicinal herb garden, or taking classes in flamenco dancing, let us all somehow continue to find time for something outside medicine that fills the mind. Only then can our personalities fully flourish, so that throughout our lives we can happily contribute to, and benefit from, society at large. Exemplars, such as Johnson, are there to help us, but it is up to us to find our own elixir. By choosing well, we can fortify ourselves with some useful immunity against disaffection.

Jack died in the summer of 1999 at the age of 81. This is also my belated memorial to a man whose highest praise of Johnson was also true of himself: he was reassuring to human nature.