

The Surprising Truth(s) about William J. Newman, MD

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J Am Acad Psychiatry Law 48:12–5, 2020. DOI:10.29158/JAAPL.003909-20

There are things I bet you don't know about William (aka "Will") Newman, MD. In writing this article, the old game called "Two Truths and a Lie" came to mind. In this game, often used as a getting-to-know-you icebreaker, players are instructed to list three statements about themselves, two of them true statements and one of them false. Players are then challenged to ascertain which statement is not true, i.e., the lie. The more outrageous the statements, the better to confound your audience. If you have ever played the game, then you are aware of how it illustrates how some people are much harder to read than others. You learn that some people are astoundingly multi-faceted, their truths surprising, and their complexity not readily apparent. This is perhaps most the case with people like Will Newman; people who are humble, unpretentious, and not given to self-promotion. Ready to play? Here are the three statements:

Before he was a forensic psychiatrist, Will Newman trained monkeys.

Will Newman enjoys coaching his son's football team on weekends.

Will Newman is known for demanding that his co-workers eat lunch with him every day.

If you do not know which of the statements are true, then I hope you will keep reading and play along. It is my privilege to introduce my friend and



William J. Newman, MD

colleague, and our new President of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL), William J. Newman, MD.

Will is the child of a child psychiatrist (his father). Growing up, Will did not want to be a doctor, and he definitely did not want to be a psychiatrist. His grandfather, a pathologist, provided another glimpse into the world of medicine. But as an adolescent, Will was much more interested in the law. He loved to read about criminology and even considered pursuing a career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Will was athletic, lettering in basketball, track, cross country, and swimming

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in high school. Although he was talented at both basketball and baseball as a youth, Will was aware that he was less skilled at basketball. This will tell you something about Will Newman: instead of choosing to pursue the sport at which he was naturally most capable (i.e., baseball), he chose to pursue basketball to challenge himself. As those of us who know Will are aware, this desire to challenge himself to grow and his ethic of working hard to achieve goals would become a defining attribute of his character.

Will excelled in school and along the way discovered a genuine love of biology. More and more, his facility for the sciences was hard for him to ignore. When it came time to declare a major at the University of Florida, where he attended college for his undergraduate degree, Will chose Zoology. It was at the University of Florida that the inception of Will's career as a forensic psychiatrist comes into focus. Working at a primate sanctuary (yes, with monkeys and other higher primates), Will became fascinated by animal behavior. Few people know of Will's longstanding interest in and love of primates, but if you have ever had occasion to wonder why his personal email is "ApemanWill@. . .," now you know why. Will's work, which involved training and habituating primates, inspired him to want to understand more about the biological basis of behavior and psychology. Spurred by his experience working closely with these primates, Will decided to double major in Psychology and Zoology, completing two Bachelor of Science degrees in only three years.

During college, Will was finding it hard to ignore the call of medicine. While he knew that medical school would be the logical choice to pursue his interests in biology and behavior, he wanted to contemplate his options and be sure of his decision. He enlisted in AmeriCorps, where he served for one year in Providence, Rhode Island as a community asthma educator. During this year-long, full-time volunteer position, he gained experience working with patients in the clinical setting, conducting outreach efforts, doing home visits, and teaching community education seminars in both English and Spanish. The experience in AmeriCorps was rewarding and reinforced his calling to medicine.

Will attended Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, Tennessee. He was initially drawn to neurology and neurosurgery. Will explored these interests through research projects and clinical experiences, but his passion for understanding behavior and persist-

ing interest in psychology eventually led him to psychiatry. During his second year of medical school, Will first encountered forensic psychiatry in a lecture. The experience consolidated his longstanding interests in criminology, biology, the law, and human behavior. Will began his general psychiatry residency at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, which is affiliated with Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri. He knew going into his psychiatry training that he would later pursue a career in forensic psychiatry.

During his general psychiatry residency, Will distinguished himself as an outstanding house staff member. He won the Consultant of the Year Award, an honor bestowed by the emergency medical department attending physicians to recognize a small number of exceptional residents and fellows who went beyond the call of duty in their work. Will explored his interest in forensic psychiatry at every opportunity, including being a recipient of the Resnick Scholarship, which funded him to attend the Midwest AAPL conference. Through his attendance as a general psychiatry resident at both the annual meeting of AAPL as well as Midwest AAPL, Will further developed his interest in forensic psychiatry and met forensic psychiatrists who remain his professional mentors to this day. Phillip Resnick, MD, and Charles Scott, MD, were both invaluable to Will as he forged his path toward forensic fellowship.

Will's forensic fellowship was at the University of California (UC) Davis Division of Psychiatry and the Law under the direction of Charles Scott, MD. This is where I first encountered Will. He interviewed during my fellowship year. I can attest to the fact that, for me, it was hate at first sight. Or at first seminar, I should say. My antipathy toward Will was due to his annoyingly perfect mastery of the legal landmark cases that we were discussing that day. I mean, who was this guy coming in to show us all up in front of Dr. Scott? As much as I was predisposed to disliking Will, I was soon won over by what a kind, funny, and genuinely good person Will Newman turned out to be.

Charles Scott said the following about Will: "I met Will early on when he was attending AAPL. I was immediately impressed by his sincere interest in learning about forensic psychiatry." Dr. Scott relayed that he recognized Will's intelligence and dedication to forensic psychiatry; he had a sense that Will would do great things in the field. Dr. Scott went on to recruit Will to join the UC Davis faculty as his Associate Training Director of the forensic psychiatry fellowship program.

He commented: "Will was exceptional. As a teacher, I trusted him with the content. I knew he was somebody I could depend on." Dr. Scott and Will have collaborated on numerous academic projects over the years. Dr. Scott added: "Will was the youngest section editor for the Rosner and Scott textbook of forensic psychiatry, and Will completed a complex section of the book. I trusted he could do it, and he did a fantastic job." While lauding Will's work and expertise in forensic psychiatry (as did everyone I interviewed), what Dr. Scott emphasized most was Will's character: his kindness, his good humor, and his genuine care for the well-being of others.

When I talk to people about Will, the spirit of their remarks is something like: "Yes, he is smart and talented and accomplished, but he is also such a good person." Amy Barnhorst, MD, worked with Will at the Sacramento County Mental Health Treatment Center, a busy inpatient and crisis unit where Will had clinical duties as an inpatient psychiatrist. Dr. Barnhorst said:

Before Will came, we [referring to the attending psychiatrists in the hospital] never talked to each other. We transferred patients from the intake unit to the back, but we really didn't have much interaction with each other. When Newman showed up, his big thing was making time for lunch together. I would be on the phone or something, and he would come around at lunch time and make this little 'squirrel feeding' motion with his hands to indicate it was lunch time, and he would drag us out to have lunch. All the psychiatrists started having lunch together daily. But we didn't just take a break and enjoy each other's company; more, we also talked about patients. It was the best thing that happened to patient care there It was so good on a professional level. It was also so good for morale.

Dr. Barnhorst continued, "Will has a great appreciation of the absurd and he never gets frustrated. There are still things we do here that Will instituted." Dr. Barnhorst relayed that, with Will's expertise in forensic assessment, one of his contributions to the inpatient unit was a process for assessment and disposition of potentially violent malingers. Dr. Barnhorst explained, "We have 'Code Red' for fires and 'Code Green' for management of aggression. We started to call the process for discharging potentially violent antisocial malingers the 'Code Newman.' The Code Newman persists to this day." Dr. Barnhorst said that, after Will left UC Davis, at a staff meeting of the inpatient psychiatrists she overheard one psychiatrist say to another: "Now that Newman is gone, what's it going to take to get us out of here?" The other psychiatrist replied, "Heart disease?" Dr.

Barnhorst concluded, "Our wellbeing and morale definitely went down when Will left. I miss that guy." Her sentiments were echoed by many, including myself. There are some people who are just good for a community, and Will Newman was a positive force of good in our workplace community at UC Davis.

When Will departed UC Davis for Saint Louis University, it was a sad day for all of us at UC Davis. It was a bittersweet day for Will because his reason for departing was a happy one: he moved back to his wife's home of Saint Louis, Missouri. He stepped in as the Medical Director of the Saint Louis University Hospital Adult Inpatient Psychiatry Services, where he continued working as an inpatient psychiatrist for patients with severe mental illness. In true form, Will Newman brought with him change to the culture of his new inpatient unit with his passionate advocacy and sincere care for the most chronically ill patients. For example, when Will noticed that indigent patients were often being discharged without important belongings, he worked with Chaplain Services to oversee a program called Discharge with Dignity, in which patients are provided clothing, eye glasses, and books as they re-enter the community. In 2017, Will was recognized with the Caring Physician Award, an award given annually by Chaplain Services to recognize physicians who embody the principle of compassionate care. In 2018, Will was awarded the I Am the Mission Award, an honor given annually to recognize physicians who go above and beyond in providing exceptional care. Will has won many awards, including being inducted into the Saint Louis University Chapter of the Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) Honor Medical Society in 2018 to recognize his exceptional achievement, leadership, professionalism, teaching and service. But for Will (as I am told by his colleagues), his greatest reward is when his patients yell "Hi, Dr. Newman!" across the unit to greet him in the morning. Will is known by all for his compassionate care of the most severely ill of our population, but his work is most clearly recognized with the affection expressed by his patients. One colleague described Will as having "old-school ethics" and as someone who is "deeply invested in doing the right thing." As someone who has worked and collaborated with Will for years, I cannot agree more heartily with these statements.

To summarize Will's numerous achievements in his career to date would take far more space than I am allowed for this article. Will has been a leader in AAPL

for numerous years through his participation on committees and task forces and his appointments in leadership positions: Councilor (2013–2016), Secretary (2017–2018), and Program Chair (a position we shared in 2017–2018). He was Section Editor for the “Aggression and Violence” section in the Rosner and Scott textbook, *Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry, Edition 3*.¹ Will has published extensively in the management of aggression and the assessment of psychosis. He has given numerous national and international talks on topics related to violence, malingering, and other core topics in forensic psychiatry. In 2019, he was promoted to full Professor of Psychiatry at Saint Louis University School of Medicine.

As psychiatrists, we know that you can learn a lot about a person by the way they cope with adversity. How one copes under stress can reveal the truth of someone’s character. With all going well in Will’s personal and professional life, in 2015 life threw Will a curve ball that could not have been expected. In December 2015, he received a diagnosis of metastatic testicular cancer. Will took on his cancer treatment with bravery, grace, and fortitude. He went through chemotherapy in early 2016, enduring side effects of the treatment including sickness, fatigue, and losing all his hair. His wife Brianne (also a psychiatrist) remembers this period: “The experience of having cancer clarified life’s purpose for Will. He focused on family during this time, but forensic work got him through the treatment sessions. He would review forensic case records while hooked up to an I.V., getting chemotherapy. It was important to him that he continue his work. He was unable to drive during that time, so I would chauffeur him to work.” Brianne said that she and Will had a pact that she would let him know, if he had any cognitive impairment, that he should not work; barring that, however, he would continue to do his job. To date, Will has remained cancer-free since completing chemotherapy, but his experience dealing with a life-threatening health concern fueled his strong belief in the importance of physician wellness. His AAPL presidential address in 2020 will champion the importance of physician wellness and work-life balance, values that Will takes even more to heart now that he has had to face his own serious health crisis.

Besides his professional responsibilities, the role that truly takes center stage is the role of fatherhood. Will is the proud dad of two daughters, Asha and Kennedy, ages 10 and 7, respectively. Will is an active father, whom his wife Brianne describes as “a get-down-on-the-floor-and-play-for-hours kind of dad.” She said, “He is a fantastic father, and he puts the family first and foremost.” In his spare time, when not playing make-believe games with his girls (I am told he is usually a sheep in their pretend world), Will is an ardent fan of strategy games, some of which he has started to teach his daughters. Reports have it that Will is unbeatable at the game of Risk. His childhood best friend, who has taught game theory at Harvard, lamented: “I can never beat Will!” Will’s wife jokingly added that games of strategy such as Scrabble had to be banned from the household because the fierce competition between them was creating less-than-ideal date nights. According to those who know him well, Will is also a “wildly avid reader” and still enjoys reading a variety of topics. When he is relaxing on any Saturday in the fall, Will can be found watching college football. He is a devoted fan of the Florida Gators and watches the games religiously. Whether working or enjoying his personal time, Will has a passion for living life that comes through in all he does.

We are fortunate to have Will serve as President of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law. The truth about him (in addition to the truths that he has trained monkeys and is known for demanding that his co-workers eat lunch with him) is that he is a consummate professional, an honorable man, and a credit to our organization. Perhaps one could have titled this article “William J. Newman, MD—Father, Friend, and Forensic Psychiatrist.” Knowing Will, I can tell you that he would be the first to put his varied roles in that order. I hope you will join me in welcoming Will to the stage of the AAPL presidency. He is well suited for it, and I have no doubt that he will be an inspiration to all of our membership as he fulfills his newest role: President of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law.

Reference

1. *Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry, Edition 3*. Edited by Rosner R, Scott CL. Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, 2017