With role models like former RCGP president Iona Heath, trainee GPs have no excuse not to appreciate that generalism is the essence of what we do and something that we should take much pride in.1 While this, of course, means recognising hidden context in presentations and appreciating the nuances of patient–doctor interactions, it also refers to clinical generalism and the ability to capably manage diseases and presentations across various systems. With an ageing and a growing population and the health burden of issues such as multimorbidity and obesity, these generalist skills are more relevant than ever. A classic line from the Greek poet Archilochus declares: 

‘The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.’

This seems to fit nicely. The generalist ‘foxes’ are cunning and able to tackle many problems, whereas the specialist ‘hedgehogs’ are protective of their one fragment of detailed knowledge. Clearly, this interpretation will not be shared by all! Yet GPs are not alone in treading the intriguing path of generalism. There are another group of clinicians who are brave enough to assess and manage patients with presentations as diverse as psychosis, epistaxis, and breathlessness. Like us, they often face difficult interactions with obstructive specialist colleagues, the frustrations of the worried well, and the constant struggle of keeping up-to-date with seemingly endless new prescribing and referral guidelines. I’m talking, of course, about emergency physicians, or ‘casualty officers’ as they were once known.

As with general practice, emergency medicine (EM) has evolved immensely in recent years. Both specialties have had their recent years. Both specialties have had their struggles to shake off their old reputations. With role models like former RCGP president Iona Heath, trainee GPs have no excuse not to appreciate that generalism is the essence of what we do and something that we should take much pride in.1 While this, of course, means recognising hidden context in presentations and appreciating the nuances of patient–doctor interactions, it also refers to clinical generalism and the ability to capably manage diseases and presentations across various systems. With an ageing and a growing population and the health burden of issues such as multimorbidity and obesity, these generalist skills are more relevant than ever. A classic line from the Greek poet Archilochus declares: 

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“GPs are no longer physicians that couldn’t pass the MRCP exam and emergency physicians are no longer failed orthopaedic surgeons.”

REFERENCES