Poetry and medicine

BY HECTOR I. MICHELENA, M.D.

The beauty and magnificence of life, with its tenderness and concealed frailty,
To exalt its miracles and unfold its mysteries,
Through assertive verb and liberating, redeeming composition,
Surrendering one's being to the nameless, uncertain institution of art,
With its penalties of solitude, poverty, and the gamble of perpetual anonymity
To cure the emptiness of inner sightlessness, to cure the anguish of existence,
To resuscitate the dead souls,
Transform hopelessness into clarity through beauty, if only for a fleeting instant.

Instead, in an act of meagre bravery but instinctive survival,
One becomes a physician,
Of an identifiable, classifiable institution,
Secured with salary, schedule, books and treatment algorithms,
Perhaps even a title, and an ephemeral seepage from anonymity
As if to cure something, irrespective of its damaged condition,
Clumsily conjecturing the underpinnings of beauty, of perfection
With irreverence, some science and plenteous arrogance,
What do human pain, fear and disgrace care about science and arrogance?
Short of verb or composition, there may be redemption:
At the hour of pain, of fear, of disgrace,
It must be the poet, the artist within, at the bedside of the sick
Transforming hopelessness into clarity through beauty, if only for a fleeting instant.

Hector Michelena is with the Division of Cardiovascular Diseases at Mayo Clinic in Rochester.