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Norwegian Medical Association in 1986, an advertising campaign was launched. Over a two-week period, altogether five full-page advertisements were run in Norway's two largest dailies, *Aftenposten* and *VG*. One of the advertisements bore the headline: «'I'm a doctor, he stated simply' ... and the crowd stepped aside.» (Figure 1). This advertisement was also printed as a poster and distributed to doctors all over the country. A footnote to the advertisement said: «Freely after Øvre Richter Frich» (10, 11).

The quotation has thus been used in various contexts and with a slightly varying phraseology. So from where is the quotation taken? Was it Carling who first used this phraseology, so that it has later circulated as a quotation whose origin is actually unknown?

Our investigations

We wished to solve this mystery once and for all. What is the original quotation? It cannot be found in collections of quotations (12–15).

The National Library has digitised 16 of the 21 books on Jonas Fjeld. These are searchable in full-text versions through *bokhylla.no* (1 April 2013). A search for «'I'm a doctor'» returns hits in seven of the books. He occasionally also introduces himself as a «Norwegian doctor». The search term «crowd» returns six hits, but none in the form reproduced by Willy Dahl.

Since the digital library is not fully complete, we have read the five Jonas Fjeld novels that are not available through *bokhylla.no*: *Hammerslaget* («The Hammer Blow») (1917); *Lucifers øie* («Lucifer's Eye») (1920); *Jorden som dræper* («Earth that Kills») (1921); *Nordlysets datter* («Daughter of the Northern Lights») (1934) and *Menneskejegerne* («The Man-Hunters») (1935).

Our closest hit is a passage in *Lucifers øie* (1920) (Figure 2). Jonas Fjeld walks past a crime scene in London where a lifeless person is lying in the street, but people gather around and he cannot reach through the melee to provide help: «Fjeld elbowed his way through the little cluster of people. 'I'm a doctor,' he said, 'and I'm at your service.'» (16, p. 80–81).

A quotation with a life of its own

Our conclusion is that the best-known version of the quotation is a construction or a compilation of several of Frich's descriptions of his doctor and hero (Table 1). The term «apocryphal quotation» is probably an adequate description (8).

In our opinion, Willy Dahl's variant is the best: «'I'm a Norwegian doctor,' he stated simply, and the crowd stepped



Figure 2 In *Lucifers øie* (1920), the 13th book in the Jonas Fjeld series, we find the quotation: «Fjeld elbowed his way through the little cluster of people. 'I'm a doctor', he said, 'and I'm at your service.'» Facsimile from the book (16).

aside». This is because it demonstrates fully the respect people had for the medical profession by immediately stepping aside, even though Fjeld stated this quite simply. There are, however, a couple of interesting differences between the original in *Lucifers øie* and Willy Dahl's version: The crowd did not draw aside in reverence; Dr Fjeld had to

elbow his way forward. Moreover, in the original he introduces himself by offering his services – in other words, the obliging, perhaps self-sacrificing doctor is portrayed here, not the more brash type that Dahl's quotation hints at.

The varying situations in which Fjeld introduces himself have no obvious features

Table 1 Variants of the Jonas Fjeld quotation

Quotation	Source
«Fjeld elbowed his way through the little cluster of people. 'I'm a doctor', he said, 'and I'm at your service.'»	<i>Lucifers øie</i> , 1920 (16)
«I'm a Norwegian doctor. My name is Dr Jonas Fjeld.»	Carling, 1976 (4)
«'I'm a Norwegian doctor,' he stated simply, and the crowd stepped aside.»	Willy Dahl, personal communication, 1992 (5)
«My name is Jonas Fjeld. I'm a Norwegian doctor!»	Hals Gylseth, 1997 (9)
«My name is Jonas Fjeld. I'm a doctor!»	Hals Gylseth, 1997 (2)

in common, and there is nothing to suggest that the crowd would be naturally assumed to step aside. So why has this quotation come to exist? Most likely, it is related to the prevailing view of the doctor, of the role of the doctor with its assumed respect and arrogance. In this regard, Carling's quotation stems from a time when there was increasing scepticism of the doctor's authority.

Medicine has a number of apocryphal quotations. «Rarely cure, often alleviate, always comfort» and «primum non nocere» – above all, do no harm – are the best known (17). Their origin may be unclear, but such constructed quotations are alive and well. What has given them their longevity? Most likely because they are so apt that someone ought to have uttered them.

Rather immodestly, we maintain that this information on the Jonas Fjeld quotation is something of a breakthrough in Norwegian medicine as well as Norwegian literary history. The quotation is not exactly as we have thought and used it. Nevertheless, the history of one of the best-known quotations about doctors is valuable and thought-provoking. It shows how quotations can come to exist and live a life of their own.

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