

I've been **thinking**...



We'll Reap *Just What We've Sown*
March 2012

I've been thinking about Adele, spring training, medication safety, and the law of the harvest.

Were you mesmerized when Adele nailed [Rolling in the Deep](#) at the Grammy's? I was. It's a song of regret over love that could have been, summarized repeatedly with, "We could have had it all."

But the mud that stuck to my wall was the climax: "You'll pay me back in kind and *reap just what you've sown.*"

I knew a guy in college who figured he'd sow wild oats all week then go to church on Sunday and pray for crop failure. Nice try. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith highlighted the flip side of the coin in observing that people "love to reap where they never sowed."

Admittedly, my youthful musings on the law of the harvest focused more on the negative (refraining from sowing *bad* seed) than on the positive (making sure I was sowing *good* seed).

I have *not* been mesmerized by my Mariners, who for the past few decades failed to sow talent. When Jack Zduriencik (fans call him "Z") took over as general manager in 2008, local sports writers noted that he was handed a "barren farm system." The M's were reaping just what they had sown—not much.

Before coming to Seattle, Z helped hoe the rows of Milwaukee's farm system. It took seven years for the Brewers to grow into a pennant contender, producing six National League All Stars.

Ten games into spring training, we are starting to see the fruit of Z's labor. The youngsters' arms are smoking, and their bats are coming alive. They've won seven. We're looking toward the harvest.

Speaking of baseball makes me think of the Brigham and Women's Hospital a mile down Brookline from the legendary Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox. The Brigham, which started scanning bar-coded patients and medications at the point of care in 2003, is reaping improved patient and caregiver safety. Their chief of pharmacy, Bill Churchill, tells me that with bar-code medication administration (BCMA), Brigham is preventing more than 90,000 medication errors annually. That's a bumper crop.

It's never too late to start sowing. Is your hospital preparing for BCMA? Here is a great [bibliography](#) from The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists to get you started.

However seasoned hospitals are in the BCMA game, [The unSUMMIT for Bedside Barcoding](#) has proven to be an invaluable spring-training ritual for many to hone their skills.

The Brigham's program director for clinical systems innovations and medication safety, Anne Bane (a dyed-in-the-wool Red Sox and BCMA fan), has been to most of The unSUMMITs. Anne is one of our all-star presenters and will step up to the plate again this May 2-4 in Anaheim. I asked this ten-year bar-coding veteran why she still comes to these meetings. Her reply:

I can go to many other conferences to learn how a piece of technology or an application works. But at the unSUMMIT, I learn how to apply the technology in clinical practice and what benefits it brings to the patients and nurses. Best to learn from others who are doing the same thing I do every day!

The sooner hospitals sow BCMA, the sooner they harvest the rewards. Adele is right; we reap *just* what we've sown—no more, no less. Maybe we can't have it all, but why have regrets over what could have been (e.g., errors prevented, harm avoided, lives saved, and careers protected)?

As the Good Book says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Hope to see you in Anaheim,



Mark Neuenschwander (a.k.a. Noosh)

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