

Medical Lessons

...on patients, doctors, information and some ideas they might share...



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- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

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- [About ML](#)
- [About the Author](#)
- [Disclaimer](#)



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- [On a Velazquez Portrait, and the Value of Expertise](#)
- [Partial Seinfeld Reunion in A.A.R.P. the Magazine](#)
- [Lessons from the Wakefield](#)

[Older Entries »](#)

On a Velazquez Portrait, and the Value of Expertise

By Elaine Schattner, M.D., on January 10th, 2011

This is an unusual entry into a discussion on the limits of patient empowerment.

In late December the *Times* ran a story, beginning on its front page, about a portrait in the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Diego Velázquez, the 17th Century Spanish painter. The news was that the tall representation of the teenage Prince Philip IV would be back on display in the European paintings galleries after a 16-month cleaning, restoration and re-evaluation of the work. And, in case you weren't up on your art history news - the painting really is a Velázquez.



Label (Ikonik's Flickr)

I learned this morning that the museum received the painting in 1913. It was a gift of Benjamin Altman (that would be B. Altman, as in the department store of my childhood...). The 7-foot portrait was considered a true masterpiece for hundreds of years, its authenticity supported by a receipt signed by Velázquez and dated Dec. 4, 1624. According to the *Times* now, in 1973 experts at the museum formally revised their opinion of the painting; they down-rated it, saying it's a product of Velázquez's studio, rather than of the artist himself.

Evidently Michael Gallagher, the chief paintings conservator at

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