

## BECOMING A PHYSICIAN APAMSA CONFERENCE SEPT 2015

- I. (Intro slide) We're going to spend most of our time reading a few poems written by medical students to get another perspective on what becoming a physician entails. First I'm going to very briefly provide some context for our thinking.
- II. Medical education is a rite of passage – what does this mean? Anthropologists have actually identified elements characteristic of all rites of passage (to become a man or woman; to join a group or gang)
  - A. Separation from the ordinary world – chosen for special privilege/challenge
  - B. Transition/marginality – enters an alien world; liminality – neither one nor other
  - C. Incorporation – become full-fledged member with new rights but also responsibilities as a result of challenging experience; you are a doctor
- III. But there are shortcomings, failings to medicine's current rite of passage
  - A. Overemphasis on logico-scientific thinking devalues skills that are linguistic, interpretive, empathic
  - B. Neglect of medicine as a moral, rather than a technologic, enterprise
  - C. Overemphasis on always being in control, whereas in interacting with other human beings, control is limited
  - D. Devaluing of personal identity and discounting personal, particularistic experience
  - E. Disqualification of narrative – pt stories become anecdotes
  - F. Encouraging distance between doctors and patients – “professional”
- IV. Medical student writing acts as a critique of the normative rite of passage
  - A. Through writing, they can consider what is happening to them and how the educational process operates from a human rather than a scientific perspective
  - B. Writing values and prioritizes personal experience and observation and allows students to think about the meaning of these experiences
  - C. Writing helps them consider which aspects of their socialization they wish to retain and which they wish to question
- V. Why poetry?
  - A. Offers an alternative to the language of science
  - B. Helps us understand narratives of others (patients, peers) that are not neatly formed, but incoherent, even chaotic
  - C. Poetry often reveals more than the author intends – it is less controllable
  - D. Because of its reliance on metaphor and image, it often provides new ways of looking at things, new insights
  - E. It is comprised of subjective particulars that lead to universal truths
  - F. It values emotion as well as intellect