

Dear PDIII students:

Thank you all very much for the opportunity to participate in the sharing of your PDIII creative projects. I was impressed by the seriousness with which you approached this novel task, and the creativity, insight, and emotion you revealed. So many powerful images linger - a little girl with a pink ribbon in her hair; the dying patient longing to be free; "Viagra heals!"; the doctor barricaded from his patient by layers and layers of bureaucratic papers; the student physician who remembers the lab values but forgets the patient's name.

Many of you struggled with the problem - and possibilities - of death: death as release, death as defeat, death with dignity, denial of death, welcoming of death, death that engenders anger, or helplessness, or reflection, or "silent screams.". Of course, you are not alone in these efforts, as all great writers and artists have also wrestled with this theme, trying to penetrate its essential mystery.

You also courageously probed the doctor-patient relationship - its intimacies, shortcomings, risks, and revitalizing elements ("I just did the doctoring"). You worried about failing your patients, or treating them like experimental guinea pigs. You mourned the affection and warmth that can suddenly, in the face of suffering and uncertainty, vanish in withdrawal. You wrestled with the meaning of your patients' suffering, for them and for you, and with the gamut of emotions run by patients and doctors alike. Like other physicians before you, you recognized that at times your patients are as much healer as healed, and that sometimes, in the press of the demand for cure, doctors harm as much as they heal.

More than once you took the risk of seeing your patients in all their complex humanity, and in so doing, allowed yourselves to become "empathic witnesses" to their suffering. Perhaps, in the end, it is this ability to truly "recognize" your patients that will enable you to retain your own humanity in the practice of medicine. If so, you have all made an excellent start. Thank you again. Dr. Shapiro