

REAL MEDICINE

Slide 1: Thank you very much for inviting me to join you for this important transition ceremony. It's an honor to be here.

So we all know that we are living in unique, bewildering, and often scary times. Although there is much reason to be hopeful, nevertheless in the midst of pandemic uncertainties is a challenging time to start your clinical training. No one knows exactly what this year will bring. But I hope you will remember how much you are needed, how much you are valued. You truly are the future of medicine.

Students sometimes feel that the preclinical years are not real medicine. Sure, you learn a ton of stuff, but it's all pretty remote from the bedside. Especially when so much of your training this past year has been virtual, it's easy to feel a bit detached from "real medicine." Today I want to talk with you a bit about "real" medicine, and what it means to be a real medical student.

Slide 2: Here you are at last, the clinical years!

- You'll be spending all your time with real patients – no more SPs, no more simulations
- No more virtual lectures– Instead, you'll be learning from and being mentored by real clinicians on real wards and real clinics
- This is, as they used to say, the "real" deal?
- But what does being a "real" medical student mean?

Slide 3: You'll see and learn a lot this year

- Great doctors you'll want to emulate
- Patients who will inspire and uplift you
- Also some residents and attendings who may seem cold and uncaring
- Patients who will make you frustrated, helpless, even angry
- Institutional shortcomings and societal failings that will leave you with feelings of moral distress and often moral outrage
- Clinical situations of great tragedy and great suffering that may create secondary trauma
- In these circumstances, how will YOU become "real"?

Slide 4: Even though you want Real Medicine to look like this....

Slide 5: Too often, it seems Real Medicine looks like this (negative)

Slide 6: Research is depressingly consistent that students become LESS empathic in 3rd and 4th years

- More cynical and disillusioned
- This is due in part to the gap between the **formal curriculum** (do as we say)
 - o CF lectures!
- and the **hidden curriculum** (not as we do)

- how residents and attendings sometimes act in real life –
- and expect you to act

Slide 7: Unfortunately, by the end of the third year, some students conclude that real medicine is

- **Physician-centered, not patient-centered**
 - Medicine really revolves around doctors, not patients
- About **doing strong work**
 - being fast and efficient
- About **knowing the right answers** – or seeming like you do
- About **getting good evals** so you can get into a good residency
- About **doing scut-work** without complaining
- About **properly filling out the EMR**, and not about witnessing and alleviating human suffering

Slide 8: Is There a Real Alternative? Lessons from a Children’s Book

I believe we can find most of the wisdom we need in life in children’s books, so I’m going to refer to a children’s book, The Velveteen Rabbit, which you may have read or had read to you when you were a kid, to help us find a better way to be real.

Basically, this book tells the story of a toy rabbit who is given to a little boy. This Velveteen Rabbit wants to learn how to become what he calls “real,” by which the rabbit means loved and valued. The rabbit consults with the Skin Horse, a toy who’s been around a bit longer. Eventually the rabbit learns that the only way to become “real” is to be true to yourself, act with kindness and compassion, and not be afraid to speak out in the face of wrongdoing. The rabbit discovers that this process is not without pain, but that it is very rewarding.

Slide 9: Let’s see what the Velveteen Rabbit 3rd year medical student discovered about Real Medicine (reading)

Slide 10: Steadiness and Tenderness

A physician mentor of mine summed up “real” doctoring in two words. To be a great doctor, he said, you need the emotional steadiness not to be overwhelmed by your patients’, to be fully present them no matter; and the tenderness to be fully compassionate in the face of that suffering

Slide 11: How To Be Real in 3rd Year I – lessons from 40 years of listening to 3rd year students’ stories

Honor yourself –learn medicine from attendings, and often great skills in the art of medicine; but in matters of humanness, trust your heart

- * Inappropriate humor – it’s probably wrong
- * Structural injustices – witness and change
- * First patient death - don’t be afraid to wonder how you should feel; to be upset, even to cry; ask for debrief

Slide 12: How To Be Real in 3rd Year II

Support each other – talk honestly and authentically about your experience

Keep a perspective

New requirements, new personalities each rotation

Constant evaluation – clerkship evals, shelf exams

Patient care/studying... friends/family... personal life???

Practice self-compassion

Slide 13: How To Be Real in 3rd Year III

- * **Allow yourself to connect emotionally – care about your patients; like the Velveteen Rabbit, it might hurt sometimes, but it will be what sustains you this year**
- * **Be humble in the face of difference – you’re going to encounter many people, patients, families, residents, attendings, nurses, who have very different values, expectations, priorities than you. You don’t have to agree with them, but try to listen to their perspective, try to learn something from every encounter**
- * **Cultivate empathy/”fellow feeling”**
 - * **We’re all in this together**

Slide 14: How To Be Real in 3rd Year III

Often, 3rd year students feel they don’t have much to contribute; they don’t matter

On the contrary, you matter very much

Like real toys, real medical students are the ones who are loved, who make a difference in other people’s lives; you can be real in this way

Slide 15: Real Medicine is what you make it

- **Remember you are always making choices about who you want to be**
- **Don’t be afraid of allowing yourself to care – feeling is what makes you human; to suffer a bit alongside your patient (or even your resident); and to help others with even less power than you have to find their voices, to speak their truths**

Slide 18: If you do these things, by the end of 3rd year, you might be a bit tattered and worn, but that’s okay. You will also be very REAL