

1. I'll be focusing on poetry in this talk because it's short and it's something I'm familiar with
2. I know not everybody loves poetry: poetry joke
3. Try not to think of the poems we read today as poems; think of them as the voice of a patient, or a physician

Two questions I like to ask residents, to soften them up so to speak. The first is: At first glance one might think that medicine and poetry are diametrically opposed professions. But thinking about the big picture, ultimate meanings...

- I. What Are Some Similarities Between Doctors and Poets?
 - A. Confront mortality and death
 - B. Create order from chaos
 - C. Seek to provide relief from suffering
 - D. Concern with healing
 - E. Must maintain an emotional balance between steadiness (a much better word, in my opinion, than detachment) and tenderness (compassion, caring)

The second question is:

- II. How Is A Patient Like a Poem?
 - A. Should make us feel something in response, as well as cognitively apprehend
 - B. Can be allusive, indirect, mysterious rather than straightforward and direct
 - C. Pack complexity and multiple meanings into a small space
 - D. Require careful, empathic attention to truly understand

“Doctors”

1. In this famous poem, Sexton takes on the issue of physician arrogance
2. With compelling and poignant language, she cautions against seductive fantasies of horseback heroes
3. She creates a vivid and powerful image that lingers in the mind long after didactic exhortations toward humility have been forgotten

“Knitted Glove”

1. In this poem, a physician struggles with his feelings of helplessness and anger at his inability to resolve the chronic pain of a patient with severe arthritis
2. Embodying the pain as Coyote, the Trickster, he wants to strangle it
3. But he realizes that, in the end, what he can give the patient is simply his presence; he can help her best by listening to her story

“Night on Call”

1. Here, an exhausted physician enumerates some of the joys of doctoring
2. Sadly, it is all too rare to hear this kind of heartfelt gratitude expressed in the typical doctors' hospital lounge, but it's really important to hear it