

AOD 2019 FINAL PROJECTS

--, thank you for an informative and useful presentation on deep breathing to let go of negative thoughts. I loved that you made this an N of 1 “study.” Your results regarding test performance were quite interesting. As you yourself recognized, deep breathing is an excellent way not only to do better on exams, but to prepare for a difficult patient encounter, to calm yourself before a presentation, or to put your best foot forward during an interview. Although you are a true scientist, I appreciated that you were willing to share this personal practice. Your seriousness of purpose commitment to managing stress to be the best possible physician you can be was very evident. I hope it inspired some of your classmates to investigate this simple but effective technique for themselves. Thank you for contributing this project and for choosing Art of Doctoring. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Boys Band, your performance of Fix You was an inspired choice. Despite mixed feelings about Coldplay, I think that is a beautiful song, and so relevant to medicine. The theme of fixing is both the goal and the risk of the profession, because of course not everyone can be fixed. And of course medicine is full of sleepless nights, failure, mistakes, and tears, not to mention feelings of being “stuck in reverse.” What is great about the song is the hope that somewhere, out there in the uncertainty, confusion, and darkness, there are lights (friends, family, colleagues, God?) that indeed can guide all of us home. Thank you for bringing an entire orchestra to class, for the keyboard and drum solos, and for the harmonies, which worked (!). Most of all, it was seeing all of you working together as a team to make something beautiful which, at its best is what medicine is all about. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear PRIME-LC students, thank you for a great presentation that shared your experiences in Peru (or not, -- ☺). I have always said I recognize a PRIME-LC student after listening to them talk for 2 minutes, because they have a broader, more complex, and more nuanced understanding of medicine than many students. You all did not disappoint in that regard. I appreciated that you highlighted some “universals” – patients value extra time and someone who listens to their stories – as well as some real differences – residents who require putting social history front and center; physicians who are accessible and compassionate and who know their country.

--, thank you for reminding us all of some basic but critical language choices: “tu” vs. “usted”; illegal/alien vs. undocumented; and the importance of checking out understanding with patients who are sometimes too polite to say they haven’t followed the doctor’s explanations. Words wound; and if you are going to be in a healing profession it’s incumbent to use them wisely and caringly.

Your project did a great job of highlighting both cultural specificity and the value of treating all human beings with respect, honoring who they are and seeking how to serve them. Thank you, and thank you for choosing Art of Doctoring this year. Dr. Shapiro

Dear A and B, your project was really interesting. I very much liked the idea of your “surveying” family and friends about a) whether they felt you had changed during your years in medical school; and if so, how? And b) how have their views of healthcare changed as a result of having someone on the “inside”?

First, it was fascinating that family and friends thought you were pretty much the same; whereas both of you felt you’d changed in fairly significant ways. This may have something to do with the fact that parents and long-term friends have “reified” their image of you, so that it pretty much set in stone. You, on the other hand, have a daily view of yourself and may be much more aware of changes that have occurred. In other words, family and friends see you as the person you’ve always been, which can be very grounding (i.e., they’re not in awe of your white coat status); while you see the person you’re becoming (which is hopefully an experience of growth and evolution, although perhaps with areas of concern as well).

If I understood your presentations, it sounded like A, your people had developed a more positive view of the healthcare system, while B, your people felt a little more negatively (although this might have been a joke 😊). I thought this was an inspired question – does having someone in medicine improve or impair laypersons’ views of healthcare? I can certainly imagine both negative and positive consequences, but mostly I was just struck by what an interesting question it was, and how I’d never heard it asked before.

Thanks to both of you for sharing something of your journey. A, it was gratifying to hear that you’ve become more confident and more empathetic (although in somewhat different ways). B, I appreciated your sharing that you really didn’t want to go to medical school and that it has taken all this time to find a path that makes sense for you. Many of us don’t have a straightforward road in our lives, but we all pretend that it’s a highway. It was important to hear your voice, and I suspect many of your classmates recognized at least a part of themselves. Thanks for your project and thanks for participating in AoD this year. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Team Been/Going, thanks to each of you for sharing a bit of your stories, where you’ve been, what mattered about those places, and where you’re headed.

A, I’m imagining you have a great shot, but what moved me more than the image of the first Indian NBA star was when you described Psychiatry as a compass and guide. I could see you have really found true north.

B, it was meaningful to see the images of family and friend, they clearly are so important in your life. You looked so tender surrounded by your little nieces. I also liked the way you embraced your many injuries as the cost of a life of risk and chance that you love. Don’t change!

C, you were both perceptive (get it? :-)) and funny about your reasons for choosing ophthalmology. On the serious side, you were pretty eloquent about how much sight matters in life. I never actually thought about having long-term relationships in optho, but you are quite right, many of those relationships last decades and are very rewarding.

D, it was beautiful to hear you acknowledging your family (all the way back to --?!) and the power of your sojourn in Ethiopia. You've found a way to unite your commitment to patients who are homeless and your love of psychiatry. It will be a fulfilling and meaningful match. Thanks too for sending the images of compassion. As you showed, compassion is found in many shapes and forms, and we all need it.

A unifying theme for you all was your love of family and your gratitude toward mentors. None of us can do it alone, and I loved learning something about the people who helped you along the way. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Great theme, Gratitude Group. I just loved that you made the many thank-you's we all feel explicit and specific.

A, highlighting residents was really nice. Residents (often justifiably) are on the receiving end of a lot of criticism for sometimes being mean, demanding, cynical, and burned-out. You reminded us all that they are more often kind, patient, committed teachers, and inspiring. I also appreciated your commitment to carry forward the support and nurturance you found next year when you are the resident and you have bewildered, insecure medical students to mentor.

B, everyone knows how important friendships are, especially friendships within your medical school class. Yet the value of these relationships is not often overtly acknowledged, so thanks for giving this shout-out. It was especially meaningful at this point when you are all about to scatter, going your separate ways into a new phase of life. I predict you will remain close to many of your classmates and will always feel deeply connected to them because of the experiences you shared.

C, we can all get behind celebrating weekends; and your presentation also contained an important message about the importance of taking time for yourself, self-care and remembering to do the things you love outside medicine.

D, you also chose an obvious focus, families, yet one that is often neglected ("they know I love them"). One of my favorite moments at commencement is when families are acknowledged and the medical students cheer them. Indeed it takes a village, and a large part of our village is our families. They deserve all our gratitude and more for helping us get to where we are in our lives.

Finally, E, I was moved when you acknowledged "everybody else." We know some of the people who help us along the way, but sometimes we don't really think about how deeply we are woven into the relationship fabric, and how for you all, nurses, social workers, techs, janitors, maintenance workers make your work as doctors possible.

And I absolutely loved the idea of thank you notes. If you recall, a lot of folks recommended hand-written thank you notes on the interview trail. But taking the time to write (even in a text message or email) how much you appreciate someone else is a wonderful gesture, and means a great deal to the person on the receiving end.

Great project, all the way around. I'm very thankful for it 😊 Dr. Shapiro

Dear Team Kids-to-Doctors, I really liked the way you interpreted this assignment and went back *all the way to the beginning!* I suspect even your classmates discovered something about you they didn't know, and for me it was such a pleasure to see you as children and hear your enchanting aspirations (garbage collector, ballerina, vet (2), grocery bagger, scientist, born-a-doctor). Most of you are going into EM (plus two future surgeons), and listening to your thoughtful and passionate analyses of why these specialties were right for you reminded me never to stereotype the more technical intervenionist specialties. Over and over I heard you say, "because I love people," "because I can treat everyone," "because I can make a difference on someone's worst day," "because of the patient diversity," "because I can help people," "because I can educate patients."

I think it was -- who said that what finally won her over to medicine was that "people are better than horses." People, for all their flaws and failings, indeed are pretty wonderful, and you have all chosen specialties where you are truly focused on people. It is really inspiring to think that in a few more years you will all be practicing medicine for all the right humanistic, compassionate reasons as ED docs and surgeons. Stay true to yourselves and there is hope for medicine 😊 Dr. Shapiro

I hope you don't mind my saying so, but I have a special fondness for you all, as I think of you as the AoD cheering section, always sitting up front, paying attention, ready to comment and get involved. Thank you for being such enthusiastic students!

And what a clever and fun project. I confess I've always regarded Poll Everywhere with some dread, as it has never worked when I've tried to incorporate into a lecture. But you all used it brilliantly, and it made for fascinating instant results. I especially liked the question about emotions, and the responses showed quite a gamut. The wordles for the most important event in medical school and what your classmates were most thankful provided evidence that, in the end, what we value most in life are family, friends, soulmates, those with whom we share our journeys. Looking forward Poll Everywhere captured the excitement of a new phase; of having real responsibility for patients; of having new possibilities opening; and, as one person wrote, "adulging" (which is definitely an ongoing process!). And I'm happy that everyone seemed to be focused on "fun" things between now and the start of residency – sleep (which I suppose if you rarely get enough can sound truly fun), Vegas, travel.

What I learned from this project was that you and your classmates have set your internal compasses toward finding true balance in life. Freud said a fulfilled life must contain both love and work. You all

seem ready to take on this challenge, and I have no doubt will do so with optimism, hope, and open hearts. All best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Team Meditation, what an interesting and valuable project. Although I am not a serious meditator, I have a long history of involvement with meditation (I learned to meditate in a monastery in Japan in 1970), and both my husband and oldest daughter are meditation researchers and teachers. It has been exciting in the past decade to see the growing applications of meditation as both a modality of patient treatment (as you are aware, there is a large literature on the benefits of meditation in treating chronic pain, hypertension, and illness-related anxiety, and improving the quality of life of patients with life-limiting illness); and as an aid in increasing physician wellness, empathy and compassion.

Your presentation did an excellent job of defining and highlighting the most important attributes of meditation. I especially liked your “research” project. It was a well-designed N=1 pre-post study with a 100% response rate. (--, thank you for your honest self-disclosure of your low score, which to my mind, knowing you a little from your essays and class comments, shows the limitations of self-report data!). On the whole, your hypotheses were confirmed. In particular, larger studies examining empathy trends in medical students validate two of your findings: 1) Women tend to report higher empathy than men and 2) Empathy changes are greatest when pre-test scores are lower.

Most important was your conclusion. Meditation has many benefits. It appeared that many of your classmates have already explored this practice and found it very valuable. However, not everyone responds positively or can maintain their commitment. For those, the main lesson is the need to find habits that can calm the mind and spirit, provide a deeper connection to others and the universe, and cultivate the balance and grounding necessary to compassionately face the suffering and fear of patients.

Thank you for highlighting the potential of meditation and for providing “proof” that it is an effective strategy for making us more centered, more resilient people. Dr. Shapiro

--, this was a really thoughtful and original project. Your pie charts were charming, and actually really informative. I particularly liked the scientific process of inquiry you brought to self-reflection. You not only recognized that our motivations (in this case, toward excellence in academic performance) are comprised of many factors, but also that the “weight” of these various forces varies. It was also fascinating the way that different factors appeared and disappeared, or expanded or shrunk in importance from grade school through high school, college, and medical school. The shift you described from primarily self-focused to primarily other-focused (in this case patients) is one that I hope all medical students make by the time they graduate.

I also thought the category of “just because” provoked an interesting discussion. It seemed you (and others) have trained yourself toward excellence. Excelling has become a habit. In a way, this could be a very good thing – being very good at what you do is as reflexive as brushing your teeth. At the same time, it’s important to always be aware of what’s driving you to outstanding performance, and to make sure that these things align with your most cherished and deeply held values. In other words, ideally your drive toward excellence should be a habit supported by what matters most to you, and not primarily in response to externals such as positive evaluation, honors, financial reward, although these things of course can also be part of your pie.

This was an exceptionally self-aware and nuanced project. Thank you for undertaking it. I’m glad you returned to medicine. You will make a great doctor. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear A and B, your two projects melded seamlessly, and both did an excellent job of contemplating your journeys to this point. A, my daughter-in-law is a child psychiatrist, and we call her (affectionately) Rainbow Sparkles, because she manages to find fairies and unicorns (metaphorically!) even in difficult situations. Your project reminded me of her – bright colors, Disney princesses, and Little Pony in the happy, excited times, but also in the anxious, crazy, and confused times. Medical school is really, really tough – but if you think about it from a certain perspective, the opportunity to become a doctor is like a dream come true. I think your colorful cartoons captured this very well.

B, your poem (please thank your mom for never letting the spark die!), was lovely and highlighted all the important moments of medical school – the promise of the white coat and the fire hose of information Year 1; the glimmers of things coming together in second year ; the double-edged sword of the clerkships; and finally, the all-in commitment (to patients and to specialty) this year. You are quite right that medical school is a roller coaster. I loved what you said about the “goodness” of the experience being found in your friends, patients, and mentors. So true.

Thank you both for choosing Art of Doctoring this year. I wish you all success next year and in the future, Dr. Shapiro

Dear A, B, and C, thank you for sharing some highlights from your lives together. You have had a beautiful journey so far, and it hasn’t happened by accident. I loved your commitment to living your lives now, each moment, rather than waiting for some point in the future for your lives to begin. All we have is now, right? You really are wonderful role models of a marriage that is a team and a collaboration. I hope others in class were paying attention to the way you supported each other and took joy in each other’s successes. This is one of the important ingredients of a successful marriage.

Thank you also for sharing your thoughts about how adorable C has changed your life, and how you have not only survived but thrived as parents as well as medical students.

Finally, I loved that you both shared your passion for research. Sometimes the MD/PhD students are a little mysterious to the other medical students, and your lovely presentation both humanized you and showed why you would voluntarily choose 8 years of study! I'm sure you are both headed toward fascinating careers, a rich family life, and an even greater deepening of an already precious relationship. Thank you for choosing AoD this year, and for periodically sharing C with us (he always made everyone happy!). Wishing you all best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Tree People, thanks for the thoughtful way you explored this metaphor: roots, trunk, and branches – a beautiful, growth-oriented way of thinking about your lives. It was a gift for me to learn a little more about your lives both in and out of medicine – it filled out the way I experience you all. Cats, Joshua trees, running, birthday celebrations – all the things you have shared, that have built your friendships, and have sustained you. A, you are a very funny person, and now I will always think of you coming out of Target loaded down with surprise purchases. B, I deeply admire and resonate to your conceptualization of medicine as a means to the end of social justice, and your commitment not to let the flame of your idealism and advocacy be snuffed out by the daily demands of practice within very imperfect institutions and systems. C, I know you share both a vision and a life (and cats) with B. I'm sure you both have already learned that having a partner at your side to fight the good fight is the best way not to succumb to disillusionment or despair. D, I will not soon forget how a banana slug can inspire a wet, cold flower-children's offspring to become a physician. And E, although you rarely have time to run anymore, neuroscience research suggests that imagining yourself doing an act is just as good as actually doing it, so see intern E running in Joshua Tree every day.

Thank you all for choosing to participate in AoD this year. It was a pleasure to exchange ideas with you! Know I wish you all the best next year and beyond. Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, I loved your insight that to change medicine, we need both data and stories. This was so well said. Thank you for sharing the excerpts from your journals. Journaling is a great practice for developing self-awareness and self-knowledge; it has therapeutic value; and it helps us remember moments in our lives that shouldn't be forgotten, but often simply vanish in the press of the daily. I also agree that, when you journal about new experiences, and then reread those entries later, it reminds you of what it is like to see things with "fresh eyes."

What struck me forcibly about your entries were how faithfully you aligned yourself with the patient. You instantly recognized on Ob-Gyn that labeling a patient a "poor historian" puts the blame on that patient for not having internalized a neat medical record to offer her interlocutor. It is understandable that a resident becomes disillusioned with the impossibility of finding resources to support a psychotic woman who delivered a baby in the park; but that disillusionment runs the risk of abandoning that patient to her demons. When an ED doc criticized the patient for not pursuing follow-up, you focused on all the factors that might prevent "f/u" from occurring. The lack of connection on L&D made you realize why women might choose home birth. You also realized that

expecting a depressed patient to “take responsibility” grossly oversimplifies the struggle of that patient just to get up in the morning, much less pursue a treatment plan. In all these examples, you understood unequivocally who should be at the center of care – not the doctor, but the patient. Always the patient.

As you concluded, just receiving the patient’s story is therapeutic – for the patient, and for the physician as well.

I hope your project inspired some of your classmates to explore journaling. It certainly illustrated how journaling can cultivate greater insight, awareness, and understanding of what is happening around us and inside us every day. Thanks again for sharing this piece of yourself. Dr. Shapiro

Dear A, B, and C, what a fantastic project! I LOVE the idea of rock art (as your clever classmate said, it rocks!). I was surprised by how moving it felt to hold a rock that had been decorated by a piece of your life. Because it was so solid, so substantial, I really felt each of you had given me (and everyone in the room) something of yourselves. Wow, quite remarkable.

A, I liked the optimism of your rock, which committed to the possibility of healing from difficult events. The discovery of Peds as your calling also seemed cause for celebration, as did going to Africa to engage your heart.

B, your gratitude toward and appreciation for the friendships you formed in first year was touching. It is so easy for medicine to become your whole world, and I liked that you remembered the momentous happenings outside medicine helped you keep your personal stress (studying for Step) in perspective. Fire was a great symbol for third year – both passionate and consuming. Your final image looks to the future in a hopeful way.

C, I suspect many of your classmates resonated both to the multitude of changes you depicted in year 1; and the utter blackness that represented year 2. “Request for outside records” was funny – and true! Your survival strategy of reflecting back on how far you’d come since pre-med is an excellent way of keeping current stresses and pressures in perspective.

I hope you keep your rocks close by where they can remind you of your past, present, and future. Thank you for joining the AoD experience this year and for your active involvement with the class. Wishing you all the best now and in the future, Dr. Shapiro

