

ART OF DOCTORING COMMENTS ASSIGNMENT 1

--, you are a very good, and funny, writer. I enjoyed the ironic tone with which this horror story unfolded. I think from your description this resident might actually win that award you refer to ("country's most incompetent"). However, I was shocked and disappointed that, after taking action at some risk to yourself, the end result was "nothing." That indeed is a crushing blow. To me, it seems you followed the appropriate course, showing considerable initiative, and that those with more power and responsibility chose not to become meaningfully involved. You were the one to suffer negative consequences, which I hear you would gladly have endured if only some substantive action was taken toward this resident, who sounds as though he put both patient care and student learning in jeopardy. Something like this destroys our faith in the systems set up to maintain professional standards and ethical integrity. I am chagrined at this outcome and ashamed that the institution should have demonstrated such a lack of will. I wonder if, on the basis of this experience, you would be less likely to express concerns in the future; or whether you would be willing to give different systems another chance. Thank you for sharing this incident. Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I agree that that was an inappropriately heavy burden to place on a medical student; and worse, as you observe, it was an ethically problematic request that does sound very much like patient coercion. "Frightening" patients into making decisions for the convenience of the team and to control costs does not seem like a very good way to practice medicine. Yet I also understand your reluctance to "upset" the team and be perceived as "too soft" on the patient. It is a common double blind of the medical student.

Part of the problem, of course, falls outside the current circumstances. In this case, a patient is asked to make a major health-related decision, with lifelong consequences when there is no continuity relationship and likely very little trust. Obviously, the patient has had negative experiences with doctors and hospitals in the past. Yet now, in a hospital, other doctors are asking (indeed, demanding) that he follow frightening advice. And all through the interpretation of a medical student! No wonder he didn't simply make things easy for everyone (else) and say "Si, si!" to the tests and dialysis. It's a tough situation for everyone. Still, it is important to put the patient's needs first. Here, I suspect understanding the patient's concerns a little more deeply (as well as helping him realize that within the near future he would probably become too sick to work) might lead to a resolution that would have felt less coerced.

All of your ideas for "the next time around" are superb. It is reasonable, under the circumstances, to advocate for the patient and try to buy him a little more time to come to terms with devastating information. Actively involving your superiors (and the ones with the responsibility for the patient's care), rather than allowing them to hand off the

responsibility to the medical student, might have been challenging, but certainly would have been appropriate (hmm, shouldn't they have thought of that?).

This was a difficult situation, where a lot of urgency was created (perhaps a little more than was actually necessary), and it sounds like you really worked hard to educate, inform, and support the patient. Nevertheless, there is only so much that even a well-intentioned medical student can do. Thank you for sharing this incident. Best, Dr. Shapiro

I think lateral pimping feels like the ultimate betrayal. I've heard other students talk about similar experiences, and the sense of being "handed over" to the enemy if you will is profound. Of course you are right – well-rested and well-fed we are always our better selves. It probably took all your internal resources not to collapse completely at that moment. Still, I wonder if you were ever able to satisfactorily answer your own question. Did you ever come to any conclusion as to what prompted this attack, what caused this previously friendly fellow student to decide this was the right time to ask what to me sound like rather esoteric questions? Did you ever pursue the incident with the other student? Was there ever any resolution? Apology? These kinds of events can linger long after they occur because they are so hurtful. I hope it was a one-of-a-kind occurrence. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Ouch. The comment made by your attending in its entirety is terrible and unprofessional, but the sexual innuendo borders on (if not is) sexual harassment. I was shocked as well. It's hard to believe that in this day and age, people can even think of making comments like this. I think it's when we are most caught off guard that we are least likely to take action, because we are still trying to process what has happened. That's why reflection can sometimes help us be a bit better prepared. I fully understand your reservations in taking action; and you are indeed vulnerable to the attending's power. Nevertheless, I do agree that challenging the attending's remark in a room full of other people might have made him realize more fully the inappropriateness of his remarks. There's no question that, especially in situations where you have little power, it's hard to stand up for yourself. Yet even a poor medical student deserves a little happiness (cf. *Fiddler on the Roof*, if you ever saw that movie) – and respect. I think you'll discover that the more you are able to politely but firmly confront objectionable behavior, the better you'll be able to sleep at night (and that would solve another problem! :-). Best, Dr. Shapiro

--, this sounds like a very difficult situation; and one thing it might illustrate is what can happen when we allow our frustrations to pile up. Once we become so overloaded, we can overreact to a particular encounter, because we are taking the opportunity to express *all* of our rage and helplessness in that single moment. It also shows how "bad blood" can

linger way past the event itself, and contaminate future situations as well. It sounds as though you and your fellow students really tried to convey your concerns to this resident, without success. That must have made you feel even more helpless.

Yes, it's possible that with phenomenal self-control you could have held it together for another week. But I wonder if you still wouldn't have avoided this person; and even considered not doing a residency here in case you had to involve her in a case. That level of discomfort suggests it might help to try once more to "clear the air." Sometimes the best thing to do is to speak openly with someone; share your feelings through "I" statements honestly but without casting too much blame; own your contribution (maybe staring her down wasn't the best way of expressing your accumulated resentment); and request resolution ("How can we move past this and work together as colleagues?"). It doesn't always work, but at least you know you did your part. I'm sorry you had to put up with that kind of treatment. Best, Dr. Shapiro