

AoD FINAL PRESENTATIONS – COMMENTS 2008

Dear --, I think you realized how profoundly you touched your classmates with your presentation today. It showed a lot of courage, but also well-deserved pride in the person you have become over the last 4 years. I hope that, overall, your sharing was a positive experience for you as well. I hope you saw that, many, many, sharing parts of yourself with others gives them a real gift. This is something that is obviously true in one's personal life, but it is also true in one's professional life. You are a wonderful, tender, caring person; and the more you bring that person into your practice, the happier your patients will be and the more fulfilled you will feel.

I congratulate you on working with your weight so diligently over this time. Maybe you have discovered a new weight loss program – the Medical School Diet :-). Seriously, this is probably a time in life when you have most excuses *not* to take care of yourself. It's quite amazing that you chose this period to make significant lifestyle changes; and that you were successful in doing so! I agree that you will be able to draw on this personal experience to both empathize with and motivate future patients.

I don't mean to sound like a broken record (that is probably a simile which is rapidly losing its meaning), but I think I mentioned to you once the incredible physician and poet Rafael Campo, who has written movingly and insightfully about his own journey as a gay, Cuban medical student, then physician. I strongly recommend his (prose) book *The Desire to Heal: A Physician's Education in Empathy*. Although his particular focus is HIV/AIDS, I am pretty sure you will resonate to his understanding of patients.

--, I feel very fortunate that I got to know you a bit during AoD this year. You are going to be a fantastic physician, and your patients will be very fortunate to have you as their doctor. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, thank you for a funny, intriguing, and ultimately thoughtful presentation. You are absolutely right, so much of medicine is reduced to numbers, statistics. This, of course, is not a bad thing. Quantification is how the scientific method advances. Yet, as you intimated, numbers do not tell the whole story. In the words of the eminent British scientist Dennis Burkitt, "Not everything that counts can be counted." If you add up all the numbers you so painstakingly calculated, you are left with... a gibberish sum. The meaning of becoming a doctor of medicine cannot be found in the numbers – or at least not in the numbers alone. Finally, I also appreciated your additional slant on numbers – in part, numbers establish your expertise, and of course your patients will value that. But (speaking as someone who has had THREE cataract surgeries!) to the patient, their surgery is the one that

counts. Everyone enjoyed your presentation, and you simultaneously seduced us into thinking about deep questions, no mean feat. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, I'm so glad the wisdom sayings session struck a chord with you :-). You really ran with this, and the result benefitted us all. Thank you! You came up with some great quotes; and I really liked the groupings you came up with as well. There's so much physicians need to know; but without question humility, empathy, and balance belong high on the list. Your selections reminded your peers to remember the humanity and complexity of their patients. As you observed, this might seem obvious, but sadly it is all too easily forgotten. Perhaps because it was the last one (and the funniest) the Erma Bombeck quote has stuck in my mind. I liked your interpretation very much: it's not so much having the *appearance* of a well-ordered office (I think I'm equally suspicious of medical offices stuffed with perfect artificial plants), but rather the evidence that you can nurture things and make them grow. That's what I'd look for in my doctor, and I suspect that is one of the many wonderful qualities you'll bring to the practice of medicine. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. Thank you for choosing such a great project. I loved that you chose *not* to write a poem or paint a picture – instead, you pushed your edge and tried something different. Of course, being you, you made a wonderfully creative and thought-provoking effort. Focusing on gratitude was inspired, not only for you, but to help focus your classmates on this simple yet powerful practice. You discovered many wonderful things – how it is the small things we are often grateful for; how gratitude can help reconnect us with our physical bodies; and how, although some may have a greater “natural” propensity for gratitude than others, cultivating an attitude of gratefulness is a skill that can be developed through practice, just like tying a surgical knot or removing a toenail :-). What a joy you are, --. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Well, --, I think you should consider supplementing the drums with the guitar. That was terrific – and brave! It's one thing to perform on stage as part of the talent show; and another to make yourself that vulnerable in front of your classmates. I can't believe you wrote such a powerful song in one night (maybe that is a projection of my envy :-)). I particularly liked the “pushing” image – on a literal level, it helped me appreciate how much “pushing” goes on in the ER; and on a metaphorical level, how much of medicine is “pushing” on the patient in an active, instrumental, even aggressive way. Of course, it's all worth it if there is a positive result; but even “pushing” as hard as you can, as your chorus says, sometimes the doctor can't do anything, or at least can't do enough. Truly, I experienced this poem in a very profound way. For me, it touches on one of the essential dilemmas of

medicine – how to balance enormous effort with inevitable limitation, how to “do all that you can” knowing it is not always enough. I deeply admire your ability to embrace this paradox clearsightedly – and sing it out. Sometimes we can resolve through music what we can never answer through intellect. Very well done! Best,
Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. You have “performed” so well in this class, except that “performed” is completely the wrong word because it emphasizes doing and acting, rather than being. So I will try again: You have simply *been* wonderful in this class, and this final project was no exception. I am intrigued and admiring that you present yourself as a carefully clipped and sculpted topiary; yet every essay you’ve written, every comment you’ve shared has shown such deep compassion and astonishing emotional insight. Those two images you provided will stick with me a long time in terms of how to understand different qualities and ways of being that people bring to their lives. They showed me that the traditional dichotomies we sometimes employ, the categories we use to file people away (the same way we do with patients) are pretty simplistic – thinking/feeling, free-spirited/disciplined. You, for example, are focused, meticulous, systematic, controlled, honed, pruned to your essence – but not bent out of shape. It was so revealing to learn that you had been a serious dancer. In my mind, dancers embody many of those “topiary” qualities you wrote about. Yet great dancers also have a lot of the “willow” in them, do they not? Likewise, I am very confident that, as a physician, the wind will blow through your leaves. Thank you for sharing with such creativity and authenticity. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, thank you so much for sharing that magical memory box. You noted that, while the destination is important, even more important is the journey; and you were kind enough to take us all on an amazing journey of the last four years of your life. I really liked your theme of self-discovery – at its best, I believe the practice of medicine (sometimes, not all the time) can actually enhance that process. It was wonderful that you traveled back to Korea and made those connections with family, culture, and traditions. You will have to choose the *meanings* of all those encounters, but that you re-found them in itself matters greatly. I also thought it very significant how many of your important memories were linked to patients – to me, that is a sign of time very well-spent. In particular, the way you worked with the “angry writings” of that one psych patient was so impressive. You may remember the times we’ve talked in class about reframing and working with our initial emotional reactions. I have never heard of a better example. Your generosity, openness, and creativity toward that difficult patient situation embodied every principle I’ve ever tried to convey about the transformative power of our values, attitudes, and intentions toward others. Congratulations on the last 4 years, and all my best wishes for the upcoming 4 and beyond. Dr. Shapiro