

PEDS REFLECTION PROJECTS 12.10.18

BEN BITNER, GREG KOJAYAN

Dear Ben and Greg, your project on Wolman Disease raised some difficult ethical questions. One had to do with the amount of resources that society should invest in attempting to save or extend the life of a child with a rare genetic disease, especially when little is known about the experimental (and expensive) treatment. Another is who should take responsibility for advocating for such a child. Still another had to do with the limits society sets on who can and cannot have children because of the medical risks incurred. As you wisely affirmed, none of these questions have clear answers, and perhaps the greatest benefit lies in debating them. Thus, when case-by-case decisions must be made, even with insufficient information, we will at least have reasoned about them, trying to avoid easy solutions and taking into consideration the complexity of the issues involved.

In particular, the project generated a provocative discussion around the line between perceived societal good and infringement on individual freedoms, especially when those freedoms belong to powerless or oppressed groups. As you know, the eugenics movement in this country and elsewhere was based on (false) science, so it is easy to anticipate that “objective” facts can be twisted for political and biased ends. Reproductive rights are a highly controversial topic, with plenty of troubling history. Yet clearly many societies have agreed to prohibit certain forms of reproduction, such as that resulting from sex between parent and child. So it is not that no lines should be drawn, but that we need to be aware of what factors are influencing our thinking about those lines.

Thank you for such a thoughtful, nuanced delineation of the issues. Best, Dr. Shapiro

CLAY THIBODEAUX, BASSEM SHOUCRI

Thank you for focusing your classmates and faculty on the serious topic of cyber-bullying. Your educational pamphlet succinctly defines the problem, and highlights the vulnerability of children. The “fast facts” section is a quick way to see which populations are most at risk, although no one is immune. The headings of “Recognizing,” “Preventing,” and “Taking Action” are excellent because they address the questions most prominent in parents’ minds, i.e. how can I know if my child is a victim of cyber-bullying?; how can I protect my child from cyber-bullying; and most importantly what can be done when cyber-bullying has occurred?

The graphics for the pamphlet were engaging, but not too intimidating, and the quotes thought-provoking. Most importantly, by creating a pamphlet you send the message that a) this is a real problem and b) it is something that needs to be talked about, with parents, teachers, and yes pediatricians. A well done and valuable project. Dr. Shapiro

ANNASHA VYAS, GENEVIEVE MAZZA, JOSH LIVINGSTON

Dear Josh, Annasha, and Genny, thank you for these lovely poems reflecting on the nature of the relationship between parents and pediatricians. They recognize how frightened and lost parents feel when their precious child becomes ill and the trust it requires to deliver this child into the care of a

pediatrician. You also do a lovely job of acknowledging what a privilege it is for the physician to assist the family in restoring their child to health and wellbeing.

The poem goes on to wrestle authentically with the painful reality that sometimes parents and pediatricians disagree; and sadly sometimes they see each other as the enemy. Then, as you astutely note, finding common ground and building trust is a challenge. Although parental gratitude is a frequent and welcome outcome, suspicion and mistrust can put a child's life at risk. You conclude, with humility, that there are no easy answers; but that the best way forward is to practice the best possible medicine while providing the best possible support to the often terrified and confused family. As you realize, this is a hard balance to strike, but it is an essential one.

The concluding limerick combines a lighthearted poetic format with a heartbreaking theme – a child facing death. Yet it was the perfect choice because it is true that often kids show a remarkable sense of perspective even when sick and suffering. Confronting death, this patient asks for a special sticker. This small vignette captures so well the courage and humor that children often display in the face of devastating circumstances. It also shows that you understand well the importance of not making assumptions and always keeping an open mind regarding what actually matters to patients.

Excellent and thoughtful work, all of you! Thank you, Dr. Shapiro

JESSICA MEMBRENO, JESSICA FARAJ, JORDAN CAHN, CHELSEA LAM

Excellent work Team Mindfulness! Your project showing some applications of mindfulness to pediatric populations was really interesting. First, I appreciated that you distinguished between mindfulness and meditation; although often paired, they are not the same thing. Secondly, there is a vigorous body of research showing that mindfulness training can have many positive impacts of child health and wellbeing and building resilience, as your summary suggests. I particularly liked your bullets highlighting key findings such as heightened compassion, increased body awareness, more patience, less stress and anxiety, and greater focus and productivity.

Your opening exercise was also quite effective – I've done a fair amount of breath practices, but what I liked about this one was the way it progressively extended the breath over time. This produced a very calming effect in a natural manner.

The three additional exercises you included seemed both fun and easy to implement. Pausing to take a few breaths is always a good way of recentering. I could easily imagine parents going on a mindful "safari" with their kids, or doing a body scan before bed (also very good for relaxing stressed out medical students!). The sneaky aspect of the whole project is that by helping parents engage their kids in mindfulness practices, you also expose the parents themselves to techniques that can reduce their stress and contribute to their physical and emotional health! Good thinking ☺ Best, Dr. Shapiro

NATHANAEL MORALES

Dear Nathanael, thank you for completing this assignment. These were two very thoughtful and well-crafted poems. The "Rinse, repeat" poem does an excellent job of capturing the routines of

outpatient care, whether well-child checks or your basic colds and flu. The rinse, repeat refrain is especially effective because it refers to routinized behaviors but also literally evokes the hand washing that transitions each patient encounter.

The second poem is much more somber, appropriately so given the severity of this child's condition resulting from neglect, and possibly abuse and even torture. I felt the poem contained both the initial excitement that comes from escaping the monotony of the daily ("something new"), only to discover the human pain and suffering that such newness holds for the patient. I was touched by your compassionate hope that the patient could "recover from the past" and impressed with the lessons you drew from the patient: i.e., not making assumptions about what is and is not possible in our society; as well as your admiration for the politeness of this suffering little kid. In medicine, as you discovered, people will often surprise you in both horrible and inspiring ways.

Best, Dr. Shapiro

MARIK-REIS, OLIVIA; LAURA ROSE; DANIELLE BRABENDER

Dear Olivia, Laura, and Danielle, This project, on "Doggos @ CHOC" was original and creative. In fact, in over 10 years of attending presentations of these reflective sessions, I do not recall another that focused on pet therapy! As you highlighted, therapy dogs serve several valuable functions in Children's Hospitals and units (as well as in adult hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, retirement communities etc.), including normalizing institutional life, minimizing stress n anxiety, distracting from pain and boredom, and helping to actualize treatment goals. What I particularly liked about the project was your recognition that therapy dogs benefit not only patients but health professionals as well (including medical students). This emphasizes that hospitals can be places of healing not only for patients but for those who care for the patients.

Your "research" (N=3) was adorable, and very much in the spirit of pet therapy (i.e., brought a smile). Your results were certainly robust! I'm glad you proved beyond a doubt that medical students like dogs at CHOC ☺ With a larger N (and maybe a control group), your "research" actually becomes a very legitimate query! As you probably discovered, there is a large body of "real" research documenting the benefits of pet-assisted therapy: <https://www.uclahealth.org/pac/animal-assisted-therapy>. So you are on the right track!

Thank you for a great project, and for all those charming pictures of therapy dogs in action. Even at one remove, dogs still bring a smile ☺ Best, Dr. Shapiro