

FM REVIEW 2009-2012 25

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: As with many of these submissions, this essay provoked a wide range of responses. Although 2 reviewers (and I) liked it, a reviewer who was originally a high school English teacher before she became a family physician, and for whom I have great respect, did not like it at all. I also consulted with XX on this one, and she made an excellent suggestion which I incorporate as a recommendation below. Overall, the unique experience of this author as a nontraditional medical student from a highly underrepresented background, her obvious passion, and her sensitivity to a term which might be overlooked by others in my view are grounds for asking her to undertake a major revision.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Dear. Thank you for this powerfully felt essay, which invites the reader in to your experiences as a nontraditional medical student, while highlighting the racially insensitive nature of a medical term still in use. We invite you to undertake a major revision of this manuscript to address the following points:

- 1) Reviewer 1 requests that you emphasize more strongly the importance of addressing culturally sensitive issues in medical training, and note why this may be especially significant in family medicine. You could do this in the concluding paragraph.
- 2) Reviewer 2 objected to the title. I personally do see the connection between feeling that the medical school experience in some respects had already "knocked you down," and the red man syndrome term was adding insult to injury. But think about whether you could convey the connection more clear.
- 3) Please consider "flipping" the two main points of your narrative: 1) your challenges of being a nontraditional medical student and 2) your concern about the racially insensitive term "red man syndrome". In other words, lead with your concerns about the syndrome name. Some readers might pass over this term in their own reading or clinical practice without a second thought and secretly might wonder why you are making "such a big deal." By subsequently revealing how, as an individual who is Native American, the phrase affected you and became a symbol for the lack of understanding you experienced in medical school, the essay might have a more powerful impact. To do this, you could cut the first 3 paragraphs, and start with the 4th paragraph, followed by para 7 and 8. You could then reintroduce aspects of these 3 paragraphs with the material in para 5 and 6, as well as the remainder of the essay, to show WHY the term reverberated so deeply for you. The main point is to show the connection between the phrase itself and your experience as a Native American nontraditional medical student.
- 4) Finally, the essay could benefit from another revisioning as well. It minimizes the problem to frame it exclusively in terms of being worried about your son or having difficulties as a returning medical student, or even being "down." Even if none of these factors were operating, the term would still be inappropriate and disrespectful. So while it is relevant to recognize the personal challenges you faced,

please think about embedding them more clearly in the larger sociocultural context (which you do excellently in the final paragraph). In other words, don't give the reader the "out" of thinking, "Oh, she was just upset because she was having a bad day."

Reworking the essay in this manner will involve a major reconceptualization, but we hope you will make the effort. This is a crucially important issue (not just "red man syndrome", but the experience in medical school of a member of an underrepresented minority group), and we would very much like to see your story in this journal.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This is a wonderfully written revision. The author outdid herself. I think it is creative, funny, and informative. I definitely recommend acceptance with minor revisions noted in the attachment and in the comments below.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Dear Ms. Bradford, what an impressive reconceptualization of your original submission. It is creative, funny, and illuminating. We are requesting only a few minor revisions, mostly having to do with awkward or vague phrasing. These are noted in the attached manuscript.

One further point for your consideration (and I apologize if this sounds contradictory to our first set of recommendations). The journal does not publish opinion pieces, and the last couple of paragraphs of this version lean uncomfortably close to offering an opinion (in my view absolutely the right one!) about the necessity of cultural competence and human connection. I've made a couple of small additions to remind the reader that this is not mere opining, that this event had a significant effect on you as a person. I wonder if there isn't a way to bring the essay back to the personal in the final paragraph - not to the exclusion of what you've written so eloquently, but to remind readers that this has to do with a real person in real circumstances.