

FM REVIEW COMMENTS 2013 20

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essays tells the story of a physician who delivers an infant with severe congenital anomalies who survives only a short time. Since the author was aware during the last part of her pregnancy of her child's condition, she also had to deal with the well-meaning questions and congratulatory statements of patients and colleagues. The subject matter is truly heartbreaking. Unfortunately, as reviewer 1 notes, it is not as moving as it should be, because of rather pedestrian writing and, as reviewer 2 notes, a somewhat superficial approach. I really wrestled with this one, because it is ethically a fine line to ask someone to probe their grief more deeply and more expressively in the interests of the audience response, but in the end I decided that since the author chose to share this story, we owed it to her to help her make it the best possible. Therefore, I am recommending major revision.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This is a terrible experience to go through, and I commend your courage in choosing to share it with a wider audience. I think your whole point is how much physicians can learn when, unavoidably, they or their loved ones end up on "the other side of the chart" (this is a wonderful title, by the way).

I hesitate to ask you to probe more deeply than you have done, but because you decided to share this story, I believe we as editors owe it to you to help make it the best possible story for the journal readers. Therefore, I invite you to seriously consider the comments of the two reviewers, and in particular these points:

1) If possible, please try to show how this very difficult experience affected you as a person. As reviewer 1 points out, sometimes your language is somewhat clinical. Help us understand you and your husband's thoughts and emotions. How did you manage to cope with well-meaning patients and colleagues questioning you about the pregnancy? How did you manage to cope with the knowledge that your beautiful baby would not live very long?

2) Many doctors cling to that "physician role" in the face of the illness or death of a cherished loved one. It sounds as though it was a refuge for you as well. Help us feel with you what it was like to "hide" in this familiar role. When you set it aside to be your child's mother, what was that like? As reviewer 1 asks, what was in your mind and heart when it "was time" to say goodbye to your child? I am not asking you to feel a certain way, but just to allow us a little more access into what this experience was like for you.

3) Finally, what effect did the loss of your infant have on you as a physician? In what ways if any did it change the way you practice medicine?

4) Reader 2 makes many excellent suggestions regarding writing style and wording, and essentially she is helping you to craft an essay that helps us, as readers, really walk with you as this very difficult journey unfolds. Please pay attention to her recommendations.

Again, please understand how much we value your putting this indescribably painful aspect of your life into words, of giving the unutterable language. We believe it will speak deeply to many other physicians out there. By working on the manuscript to help the story seem more transparent and immediate, we think you can make it even more accessible.

Thank you very much for considering these recommendations.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This essay recounts the tragic story of a family physician whose third child survived only a few months due to several congenital anomalies. Reviewer 2 did a fantastic job of making very specific suggestions to improve a rather clinical, wooden writing style. The author has significantly improved her manuscript by incorporating most of these suggestions. She has also responded to recommendations to try to show a bit more of how this very difficult experience affected her personally. I've made some additional edits in the manuscript itself and encouraged her to revise once more.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for the careful attention to Reviewer 2's excellent and very specific suggestions. They have improved the quality of your essay considerably. We appreciate the effort you have made in revisiting this very painful event. We have made some further minor suggestions mostly to improve the flow of the essay. In a couple of places, we encourage you to say something more about your feelings. For example, what were those nights like when you were alone with your daughter, trying to keep her breathing tube clear and prevent her seizures? We ask you to make one further revision of this essay in order to help clarify what this experience was like for you, so that readers can learn from your sharing. Please know that we appreciate your willingness to offer this experience to others. As you say, at some point every physician is on the other side of the chart, and it is well worth contemplating that truth.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: This essay has represented a fine line in that the author is writing about the death of her own infant. I have tried to chart a course between helping her to craft the best essay possible while not being insensitive to her obvious personal involvement. The author has been quite courageous in my view in returning twice to wrestle with the material and make further revisions. I as well as other reviewers pushed her toward more personal disclosure, difficult as that might be. I think the author has made a very good effort toward showing us what this tragic experience was like for this mother-doctor. I'm pleased with the essay and encourage acceptance.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you very much for this excellent revision. I admire the courage it took to keep wrestling with such painful material, especially over the holidays. The reward, such as it is, is that you have written a moving and insightful article that really allows the reader to understand the complexities of this experience. Although thankfully not every physician-parent will suffer the loss of a child, as you point out, eventually every doctor will be "on the other side of the chart." When they are, I think your essay will help them know they can cope.