

## **FM REVIEW 2013 38 COMMENTS**

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** Reviewers have done an excellent job of identifying strengths and weaknesses in this essay. On balance, I recommend major revision. There is a good story in here, but it needs to be crafted more clearly.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Dear Ms., you tell a poignant tale of a patient falling through the cracks, made all the more distressing by the fact that, in this case, the patient is your father. Thank you for sharing his deeply personal event with us. You are a strong writer, and your use of metaphors (the key, the crack, the lens) all help to bring the story to life.

However, in its present form, it is not ready for publication. The reviewers have provided outstanding suggestions for improving the piece, and we hope you will take these into consideration. Of particular importance are the following:

- 1) As reviewer 1 suggests, you could summarize your father's experience more concisely. Consider abbreviating the section on your father's background, as well as the specifics of how the stroke could have been anticipated. Similarly, the plane ticket issue could be condensed or cut. Rather than "telling" (this happened, then this happened"), try more evocative writing that "shows" the reader what was happening. Readers will be less interested in the specifics, and more focused on your general theme of "falling through the cracks." Help us feel more strongly what this is like for patient and family.
- 2) It is unclear what your overarching point or theme is. Is it that physicians and medical systems need to be more vigilant to prevent patients falling through cracks? Or that medicine is necessarily fallible? Is it what happens AFTER a patient falls through the cracks? What family members and patient must deal with? Is it the guilt you felt (albeit irrational) for not being able to prevent this? The isolation you felt as a medical student with "specialized understanding" of what happened, understanding that the rest of your family did not possess? If you could think about WHY you are telling this story, you might be able to focus it more effectively.
- 3) Reviewer 2 notes that the final paragraph seems abrupt and incomplete. I don't agree entirely, but I do think the paragraph suffers from a lack of clarity about what you are trying to say in this piece. This paragraph might consider what you've learned from this devastating experience that is relevant to you as a future physician. I am not asking for a "happy ending," so if the only thing you've learned is a sense of dissatisfaction and fear, that's fine. But I would like to see evidence of additional insight beyond the fact that you couldn't have saved your father (unless of course this is the main point of the essay, and then it should be reworked to reflect this focus).

I agree that the essay holds much promise, and I'd like to see you put thought and energy into a revision.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** The author has made an exceptional effort to consider and thoughtfully address reviewer concerns. While she did not always make the changes requested, she provided a well-considered rationale for her decision in each case. The essay

**is better focused and its main point about the inevitability of things - and patients - falling through the cracks emerges more clearly. I believe the piece is now ready for publication.**

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for your conscientious consideration of each reviewer's suggestions. The essay is more concise and it is easier to see each point as contributing to the overarching theme that the specialized knowledge of medicine can be a burden; and that despite the best intentions, not everyone can be saved.. The concluding paragraph is also much improved and now supports the main thrust of the essay. Less indeed often is more, and the essay has benefitted from your judicious deletions.**

**We also appreciate your intention to honor your father, both who he was and who he is.**