

## **FM REVIEW 2013 43 COMMENTS**

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** I like the idea of this submission (in contrast to the reviewer who seems to find it demeaning to the image of family docs), but it needs a lot of work. I try to provide the author with guidance below. I am also attaching an edited ms.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Dear Dr., in concept this is a moving essay, but it requires significant revision and rewriting before the gem can emerge from the stone. I do not agree with reviewer 1 that this is the "wrong time, wrong place" for this essay. In my read, your story shines a light on all that is humble and patient-centered in family medicine.

The bigger problems are with the story itself. I disagree with reviewer 1 that the "pedicure" should be relegated to the sidelines. This is the heart of your tale. However, as reviewer 2 notes, you need to do more work to help readers understand the dramatic significance of this gesture. I recommend you review a wonderful short story by the surgeon Richard Selzer ("Toenails," in Letters to a Young Physician) to see how a master does it. In your case, showing rather than telling is key. Provide details that bring this encounter to life. Consider inserting actual dialogue instead of he said, I said.

The title could use some work as well. There is really no evolution FROM washing feet TO trimming toenails, it's all part of the same act. Also, you are not so much describing a typical day as trying to say something about the core values of family medicine symbolized through your toenail clipping. Find a title that conveys this.

Finally, please pay attention to minor grammatical issues. It might help to have a colleague or mentor review this piece for input on the writing style.

I have provided an edited version to help guide you in your revisions. Good luck, we hope to see this essay again.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** This version is improved, but not enough to accept as is. The writing is still rather prosaic and in places clumsy. Also, the author has introduced a religious foundation for his posture of servanthood, which may restrict the connection readers have with the essay. Nevertheless, the author has put sincere effort into this draft. I recommend minor revisions based on the attached draft which I've edited fairly extensively.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II:** Dear Dr., thank you for your painstaking revisions. It is apparent that you took reviewer concerns and suggestions seriously, and made sincere efforts to address them. Thank you also for changing the title, the current one is more accurate and more appealing. The current version is much improved, but still requires some work (please see attached draft for suggested changes). In particular, please pay attention to the following:

1) As originally requested, the essay would be more engaging if you provided actual dialogue, rather than the cumbersome he said, I said. I've provided examples of how you

might do this, although you are of course free to choose your own language based on your knowledge of the patient.

2) While it is helpful to understand that your concept of servanthood is based on your religious beliefs, I'm not sure citing a specific biblical passage is needed. Please consider omitting.

3) There is some redundancy in the essay regarding the (excellent) insight that a true family doc addresses all patients' needs as best he or she can given the resources available. I've tried to eliminate this repetition, please consider these deletions.

4) While I agree that the feet washing/toenail clipping was likely a very significant experience for Thomas, it seems a bit hyperbolic to frame it as life-transforming. I've tried to tone down language about this encounter changing his life.

5) The entire essay should be around 1,000 words. I've made a few additional cuts to better approximate this length. Please review the ms with an eye toward making it as succinct as possible.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** The author has accepted all suggested revisions. I recommend accept.

Please note, I think there should be new paragraphs pg. 2, line 53, "I smiled..."; pg.2 line 56, "I trimmed..."; pg. 3, line 48, "After we finished with the trimming..."; and pg.3, line 53, "Then looking me and my MA squarely..."

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Thank you for your patience and attention to detail. I think the result is a very fine essay.