

FM REVIEW 2014 12 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is an essay by an accomplished physician writer who has participated in a narrative writing workshop with Dr. Rita Charon, the acknowledged leader of the field. Both reviewers liked the essay, which has to do with the difference physicians make in the lives of their patients, and how important learning this is to the doctors. I did not like the essay as much as the reviewers did, and I especially struggled with the structure. The author shares one personal anecdote (which is quite moving), but then recounts an even longer anecdote about a physician classmate in the writing seminar who is also a patient, which struck me as tangential and not nearly as compelling. I am recommending major revision.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This is an intriguing essay which makes an essential point about the mutuality in the physician patient relationship, so well articulated in the sentence: ""You think about the ways in which we need each other, patients and physicians, and you decide that the space in which stories are told and shared and answers sought and offered and thanks given and received is the place where healing begins." Like reviewer 1, I found this to be the heart of the essay, and it should be made as central as possible.

The anecdote about your own patient is powerful and moving, and well illustrates the above insight. However, I felt the story about the physician classmate who was also a patient was much less effective. It had a third party feel to it, and lacked the raw emotion of your own experience with your own patient. I recommend eliminating this second story, and instead substituting another incident from your own practice. If you feel strongly that you must retain this particular example, please consider how to bring it to life more strongly. Regardless, I suggest you delete the explanations about the closing of your practice and making your way to the narrative medicine workshop. This also detracts from the main point you wish your essay to convey - which is how much doctors and patients need each other, how much they give to each other. I think you could also make more of the title "Gratitude," as there is so much to be grateful for on both sides of the white coat, yet it is easy for both patients and physicians to overlook gratitude in the press of the stresses and strains around illness and healthcare. Finally, the choice of the second person is a bold one. Like the reviewers, I struggled with it a bit, but in the end felt that it effectively draws in the reader, and makes the message more universal.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This essay is about the importance of patients expressing gratitude toward physicians; and how grateful physicians are to receive this gratitude. The author has made some of the requested changes, especially certain deletions, that improve the focus of the essay. Unfortunately, both grammatically and logically the essay is still somewhat garbled. Specifically, it loses the thread of gratitude toward the end of the essay, and begins to talk too generically about the importance of patients' sharing their stories and their emotions, both good points, but tangential to the main message of the essay. I have edited the essay extensively, as well as made many comments, and hopefully these will guide the author on a further revision.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for your edits and deletions. They improved the essay, and brought the story of the workshop into better focus. You've done an excellent job of showing the relevance of this story to the overall essay, and I now agree that it has an important role to play in developing the overall message.

There are still several issues that need to be addressed.

1) The issue of tense needs to be consistent. When you are using the second person, generally verbs will be in the present. When you are recounting the story of the patient and surgeon, this should be in the past tense. Please look at the edits in the attached.

2) The ending of the patient and surgeon story seems a bit disorganized. Please consider the suggested edits; and rewrite to enhance clarity. Also in this story, try to avoid "telling" the reader what is happening ("Thus they began a path toward her eventual healing"; "carefully helping her to recover her memory"; "the act of grieving represented an essential aspect of her healing").

3) When you reflect on the patient/surgeon story, you are deeply moved by it, as you write. But it seems to me you are also surprised and disappointed that the patient's gratitude was never shared with the surgeon. Isn't that the point you're moving toward? How valuable it is when patients share their gratitude, and how grateful physicians are when this happens? Please look at suggested edits to see if you can bring out this point more clearly.

4) Toward the end of the essay, you seem to lose the focus on gratitude, and bring in sharing of patients' stories and emotions. These are wonderful things to share with one's physician, but are tangential to this particular essay, which is about patients expressing gratitude toward physicians and physicians feeling grateful for this gratitude (at least, this is what I understand to be what the essay is about). Please see edits, where I've tried to clarify this confusion, and insert a few additional references to gratitude in both physicians and patients.

I like the last line a lot. It expresses what I've attempted to clarify earlier that when physicians are lucky enough to receive explicit gratitude, it engenders feelings of gratefulness in them, and thus as you say so eloquently is that space where healing occurs.