

FM REVIEW 2014 32 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is an interesting essay primarily because it concludes that home visits and eliciting a patient's complex psychosocial history are not simple panaceas. However, I am much more in alignment with Reviewer 1 than with Reviewer 2. Unfortunately, the essay strikes me as a very superficial rendering of this experience: "We did a home visit - check. It didn't make any difference, but at least I did my best." I would like to give the author the opportunity to deepen her analysis of what went wrong here and how understanding the patient's perspective might have been more strongly incorporated into the treatment plan.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: The strength of this essay is its honesty - you do not tell a simple narrative of a home visit and learning the patient's psychosocial history leading to a happy ending. However, as Reviewer 1 points out, the essay as written does not dig deeply enough. To craft a really strong and illuminating essay that will be useful to other clinicians and medical educators. Please consider summarizing what you learned from this patient during the home visit more briefly, and devoting more time to discussing the following: 1) how the home visit changed your approach - and your attitude - to the patient (you hint at this pg. 4, lines 6-13, but I'd like to hear more. You go on to say what you did, but not why you chose to do these things) 2) how the team adjusted their approach based on the visit - did all these healthcare professionals continue to be involved in her care and coordinate their efforts? 3) why you think the important information gleaned from this visit was not enough to positively influence resolution of her health issues - was there just too many overwhelming problems to address with "baby steps"? 4) what you would do differently - if anything - with similar patients in the future. Would you bother with a home visit again? If so, why? Is it more than something to check off the to-do list? Try to think more reflectively and introspectively about what happened here. Family docs see patients just like this every day. What is unique are the insights you can share with our readers about how you tried - and failed - to manage her successfully. We can learn a great deal from lack of success - and we rarely hear these stories. So write yours - but help us see what went wrong and what might happen differently.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This submission discusses the impact a home visit had on a resident, how it changed her view of the patient and spurred her on to greater efforts. It is an interesting essay because the result is failure - the patient doesn't improve. This is an intriguing premise, and is closer to some patient narratives than we'd like to believe. For this reason, I'd like to have the author make one more effort. She has done an excellent job of revising from a stylistic perspective which has focused the essay and helped it to read better, but I don't think she's put sufficient thought into what she learned from this experience. Her conclusion "I can say I tried my hardest" seems somewhat self-centered and self-congratulatory. To me there's much more to be learned here in terms of accepting the limitations of physicianhood and doctoring while not abandoning hope that the patient can improve her circumstances. I've provided some light editing in the attached version plus extensive comments.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for your edits in the revised essay. The writing is much improved stylistically and as a result the points made stand out much more clearly.

I would still like to see you wrestle with the last paragraph more deeply. This is where you are sharing the lessons that you learned from this experience. I don't think the most important lesson (or at least not the only lesson) is that you could say you "tried your best." Other lessons have to do with accepting the limitations of doctoring, with humility, with imagination, with persistence, with respect for patients struggling in very difficult circumstances etc. I'd really like to see you at least allude to some of these other lessons. Please pay attention to the comments in the attached edited version.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: I'm impressed with the author's latest revision. Despite encouragement, it is difficult to go deeper and honestly confront why a patient interaction didn't result in the expected outcome. Of course the reasons are multifactorial, but in this case, the author was able to see that, despite her enthusiasm for the home visit, she had not really listened to her patient. It takes a humble physician to admit this mistake, and I have great respect that she was able to do so. It is not the most eloquent essay, but it has a workman-like honesty from which other physicians and students can learn a valuable lesson. In particular, it reminds us that the home visit is not a magic bullet that miraculously cures the patient's ills; rather it is one arrow in our quiver, and how we use that arrow matters a great deal.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you for such an excellent revision of your essay's final paragraph. You surprised and delighted me with an insight into your story that I had missed. Indeed, despite your enthusiasm and appreciation of the home visit, you did overlook the patient's expression of her own goal. It takes a humble physician to admit this oversight, and I have great respect that you are able to do so. You were able to excavate a truly valuable insight - that home visits are not a magic bullet; instead they are simply one additional opportunity we have to see the patient from a different perspective and really listen to her. You've turned this into a really interesting and perceptive essay. Thank you!