

## FM REVIEW 2014 14 COMMENTS

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** This essay, about a medical student's relationship with a dying patient, is not especially original. However, it would make a valuable teaching essay because the reactions of this student to the patient and to the situation are so widespread and recognizable among medical students – anger, fear, sadness, hopelessness; identification with the patient. I think we (reviewers and editors alike) are all sympathetic to student-authors; and we do have to be careful that the journal does not become an outlet for the huge volume of essays being cranked out by reflective writing sessions in medical schools these days. Nevertheless, I'd like to give the author a chance to improve and focus this essay through a major revision.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** This is a heartfelt and honest essay about your relationship with a dying patient. Your emotional awareness is especially commendable. This patient sounds like a wonderful woman, and it is no wonder that you felt close to her.

We invite you to consider revising your work. Please pay attention to reviewer 1's critique. In particular, make a better effort to work within the "traffic" metaphor. Despite this being the title of the essay, you do not present compelling images of "traffic" in the hospital and how your patient intersects with this traffic (merging, slowing, red lights etc.); or how hospital traffic is connected to rush hour traffic (rushing, clogged, helpless etc.). The last two paragraphs of the essay, which are very well-written and quite moving, use the traffic metaphor well – now extend this to the rest of your essay.

Secondly, Reviewer 1 is correct that the essay rambles a bit. Detail is a good writing technique, but some of the details in the essay do not really advance your story. Related to tightening the essay, please avoid clichés or "lazy" writing ("loving family," "loving visitors," "sigh of relief," "ups and downs"). A few other stylistic revisions – pg. 3, try "I was grateful for" rather than "I praised" (line 44). Also, the sentence "becoming one with the rush hour traffic" does not really make sense. The patient is not "one" with the traffic. Perhaps she will merge for a brief moment with that traffic before she is returned once again to a medical environment, this time to die?

Finally, tightening the essay should allow you to add a paragraph reflecting on what you learned from this experience that you intend to carry forward as a future physician.

With additional wordsmithing and focus, you can craft an essay that will resonate with our readers.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** The author has done a good job of attending to both my and reviewer 1's suggestions. We encouraged her to develop the traffic metaphor more explicitly throughout the essay. However, she pretty much ignored reviewer 2's request that she say something about how this might affect her future practice of medicine. Since she has 220 words left, her excuse that she is constrained by the word limit is not especially persuasive. Below I've asked her to consider this question and write about it.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II:** You have done an excellent job of bringing the traffic metaphor to life, and I hope you see how doing so ties together the essay and gives it additional coherence. I do think it important that you consider reviewer 2's point about what you learned from this experience. Your insights on this point do not have to be comprehensive or complete; but since Family Medicine is a journal for medical educators, it is important to show some aspect of learning or implications for practice. You might fruitfully continue your traffic metaphor - life in the hospital for learners is a lot about things moving quickly and efficient (lots of green lights) and about finding the most direct route to your destination (avoiding detours and "dead ends"). By visiting Nancy you went "off-road" a bit, but in doing so had the opportunity to appreciate what lay off the main highway. I think you'll remember giving Nancy that stuffed animal, and I think you'll remember that final goodbye. Help the reader see what you learned about doctoring from knowing this patient.

Please also consider a few specific edits made in the attached manuscript.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR III:** This submission uses a traffic metaphor to show how the life of a dying patient and a medical student intersected. She has worked hard on the revisions suggested, and has made substantial improvement in the essay. I like the way the student uses traffic imagery to explore how serious illness derails the patient's life; and how valuable it can be for the medical student to veer off the main road to get to know the patient. The author also added a concluding paragraph that suggests how her relationship with this patient influenced her view of what it means to be a physician. I think this essay is about as good as it can get and I recommend publication.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III:** Thank you for your conscientious revisions. The concluding paragraph is an excellent addition, and suggests how your relationship with this patient influenced your view of what it means to be a physician. You've also done a very good job of working within your traffic metaphor which ties together the essay. We appreciate your sensitivity to this patient, your acts of attention and kindness, and your recording in this essay all that you learned from her.