

FM REVIEW 2014 17 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay considers the fatalistic attitude toward breast cancer in an impoverished Miami community. It makes interesting parallels between patient and physician learned hopelessness. It emphasizes the importance of dialogue and patient empowerment. Overall it is well-written and vividly evokes a particular patient encounter, while locating it within a larger communitarian and cultural set of assumptions. The author makes a few missteps, notably by talking about "changing a culture," but overall the essay has promise and I think can be fairly easily revised in ways to strengthen its most intriguing points.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this essay, which highlights the fatalistic attitude toward breast cancer in an impoverished Miami community. It makes interesting parallels between patient and physician learned hopelessness. It also emphasizes the importance of dialogue and patient empowerment. Overall it is well-written and vividly evokes a particular patient encounter, while locating it within a larger communitarian and cultural set of assumptions.

The essay could be strengthened considerably by paying attention to a few points. First, one of its best observations has to do with the parallels between patient and physician, but you undermine this when you state in the next to last line "this is not about me." In fact, while you want the main focus to be about the patient, it is about you as well, and how both of you can overcome your learned hopelessness. Please consider ways of underlining this excellent insight.

Second, I think the question about "changing culture" is misguided. It sounds rather patronizing, and I am sure from the rest of the essay this is not your intent. In fact, you seem to be talking about changing an aspect of a belief system that has the effect of disempowering and paralyzing women in the community; as well as per above, changing an aspect of your own belief system that wants to give up on these patients. Please try to make this point clearer.

In regards to "culture," it was unclear to me (and I think to reviewers as well) whether you felt the fatalism you described grew out of the culture per se. At one point you describe X as a heterogeneous community, but in mentioning Ms. L's accent, you seem to link her beliefs about cancer to her cultural background. As a result, reviewer 1 suggests you frame this within a global health context, which I'm not sure is your point. Is the issue Trinidadian culture, poverty, or some combination of the two? Help the reader understand what is the "cultural" origin in your mind of the cancer-related beliefs you are trying to change.

Please attend carefully to reviewers' comments, which are excellent. Please also consider the specific edits and suggestions made in the attached document. With appropriate revision, this can be a strong and valuable essay.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: The author has done a very good job of revising this draft in ways which either incorporate or address reviewer and asst editor concerns and suggestions. I particularly like the way the essay makes a parallel between the learned hopelessness of the patient and the learned hopelessness of the physician. The writing reflects the author's struggle as well as her deep commitment to the women in this underserved community who are so fatalistic toward breast cancer.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for these revisions. The essay has been brought into sharper focus, especially the parallel between the learned hopelessness of both patient and doctor. I've suggested a few additional minor revisions. For example, variations of the word "empower" are overused. In a few places your intent is not clear, at least not to me. With a final small polishing, I think this will be a beautiful piece that shows the importance of not mirroring the resignation of patients and not giving up on them.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has done excellent work on this essay. I can recommend no further changes to improve it, and recommend accepting it for publication in its present form.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you for the care you've taken with this essay. All the modifications, large and small, have made it a strong and moving piece. The concluding paragraph is especially fine. Your patients are fortunate to benefit from your care and commitment.