

FM REVIEW 2015 13

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is a rather disjointed essay. I think its point is that family medicine requires a great breadth and depth of skill and knowledge, and you must stay ready through constant practice and preparation. One reviewer enjoyed it, but I agree with the first reviewer who found it a hodge-podge of metaphors that did not really elucidate the main point of the essay. I was tempted to reject it straight out, but since we have few narrative essays in the pipeline and since one reviewer found merit in it, let's give the author a chance to make something of it.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This essay seems to grapple with the breadth and depth of the specialty of family medicine, and how important it is to, like a boy scout, "always be prepared." This is a worthwhile observation, although of course familiar to any family doctor, and the essay will require more work to hone what is interesting about your particular message. If you had to state the point of your essay in one sentence, what would it be? That Family Medicine can be intimidating and requires lifelong learning and practice? I think most family docs know this, so the more personal sharing you do in your essay, both in terms of how this aspect of the specialty makes you feel and how you have developed strategies for coping with the demands of the specialty, the more value readers will find in it.

Once the central theme is clear, you need to decide which anecdotes will best support and illustrate your idea. As reviewer 1 points out, the essay sometimes confounds practical skills (such as knot-tying, perhaps the equivalent of practicing scales?) and cognitive skills (such as note-taking and mental rehearsal). Perhaps you are saying that in medicine, the scales you must practice involve both manual and cognitive dexterity?. Is your point that you must regularly rehearse and review what you know with both your hands and your mind? The fact that I cannot confidently restate your purpose suggests it requires greater clarity.

In terms of your notetaking per se, did you intend this as an example of "practice"? If so, can you connect the dots more clearly? "Reviewing these notes was my version of scales." On a smaller level, the dermatologist story seems a bit tangential. I think your main point was that you started taking copious notes of practices and procedures to help you keep track of all you were learning. Maybe you could cut the reference to the dermatologist entirely?

I agree with both reviewers that there are too many metaphors in what is necessarily a short essay. Stick to one (scales, knife, journey?) and develop it throughout the essay. Think about what it means to practice scales (for instance) and connect those insights with the "practice" you engage in as a physician. Try to make the necessary points working within a single metaphor. For example, you could say that a musician, despite extensive preparation, never knows what a live performance will bring, and so must be ready to change her plan, improvise, etc.

I also understood why reviewer 1 felt that the restaurant story did not seem to illustrate your point very well of always being prepared. I vaguely remembered that in the long list of practices you routinely reviewed was mention of foreign body airway obstruction, so in fact the story fits quite well, but I had to figure that out. Without giving away the climax of your story, see if you can highlight this

connection a bit better. Maybe you could mention after you return to your dinner that this was one of your routine scales, and the practice paid off.

With a little more focus this will be a worthwhile story about how one family doctor has come to terms with the challenges and rewards of his specialty. Thank you for considering a revision of this work.