

## **FM REVIEW 20115 21 COMMENTS**

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** This essay poses a conundrum. It starts off with a brief anecdote about a patient calling his physician a racial epithet. However, the large majority of the essay is basically an opinion piece about the "ghosts" of racism in the exam room. It is simply not a narrative essay, but rather a passionate opinion piece about how the dynamics between doctor and patient mirror larger societal tensions and biases. It is well-written and perceptive, but is not primarily narrative. However, I understand that the essay has already been rewritten once by the author, and that this probably represents his best compromise. It is indeed a crucially important essay, and the journal readership needs to hear this voice. Perhaps in light of the positive reviews it received, we should make an exception for it?

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** This is a passionate essay about the "ghosts" of racism that inhabit the exam room as a reflection of larger societal problems and tensions. The opening anecdote is both powerful and shocking. We feel this is a crucially important essay for the journal's readers to reflect on. We would like you to consider a few minor revisions, as follow:

- 1) Reviewers had difficulty with your use of the word ghosts. I personally liked it very much, but in view of this confusion, please consider a brief phrase to explain its meaning in the context of your essay.
- 2) The narrative essay section emphasizes personal stories. Reviewer 1 raises some excellent questions about the initial story you share. Given the length constraints of this section, you cannot address them all, but if you could elaborate just a little more on what happened in this story, while remaining close to the 1000 word limit, it would make your essay less of an opinion piece and highlight the human aspect.
- 3) Reviewer 1 makes other excellent suggestions about possible minor revisions. Please consider these carefully.

Thank you for having the courage to show us that the exam room is not objective, impartial space somehow free from bias and racism. Rather, it is a reflection of our larger society, and to pretend otherwise is self-deceptive. Your conclusion reminds physicians not to ignore race and other 'uncommon denominators," but rather to address them both in themselves and in patients that will help to lay the vicious ghosts of the past to rest.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** The author has made all requested changes. This important essay on the enduring presence of racial issues in clinical encounters makes an invaluable contribution to our journal; and I am so pleased to be able to accept it.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II:** Thank you for your in-depth response to our last exchange. I would like to go on record as saying I have learned a great deal from both the essay itself and your comments elaborating your thinking. For example, your nuanced point about affirmative preference not

implying "preference against" is one of the clearest statements I've read about cultural/racial/linguistic "matching" in clinical situations.

On reflection, I agree that the limitations of this section's length restrict your ability to expand on the original patient encounter, and feel the story stands on its own as is. The addition of an explanation for your conclusion that the patient was drug-seeking is helpful, thank you.

Thank you also for your explication of the marvelous phrase "ghosts in the room." The additional phrase I believe will help readers anchor this concept.

Finally, your insight that both patients and ghosts need to be addressed directly and explicitly makes perfect sense to me. I appreciate the revision you've made of the essay's final line; and feel it does capture this inclusive double movement. However, if you would like to rewrite the line further to incorporate your idea to an even greater degree, please let us know that this is your desire, and we will be happy to accommodate it. We want to be sure that the essay says what you want it to say.

As a context for these detailed deliberations about words and phrases and their meanings, please know how important the editors at the journal feel your essay to be, and how honored we are to publish it.