

FM REVIEW 2016 1 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay raises a critical issue about when - or if - physicians should intervene with cultural practices that are potentially harmful to their patients - in this case, the arranged marriage of a 13 year old girl. Unfortunately, the essay is poorly written with grammatical errors and run-on paragraphs (English as a second language is perhaps an issue). It is also long (1227 words). Finally, and most importantly, the last couple of pages are essentially an opinion piece about the need to act as an agent of social change (again, in this case, attempting to educate parents about the problematic nature of this longstanding, deeply engrained cultural practice). My recommendation is to return the essay as rejected, but indicate we would consider a significantly revised version that focuses on the narrative and does not editorialize; that stays within the section word limit; and is reviewed by a colleague to critique the writing style.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this thoughtful essay that raises provocative questions about when - or if - physicians should intervene with cultural practices that are potentially harmful to their patients (in this case, the arranged marriage of a 13 year old girl). The example you provide is troubling, and the possible "solutions" themselves raise many problematic issues. The analogy to the young virgins being feted in ancient Egypt before being sacrificed to the gods is particularly compelling. This is certainly a topic that we consider worth exploring further.

Unfortunately, we are not able to accept your essay in its present form. The most significant problem is that the last couple of pages are essentially an opinion piece editorializing about the need to act as an agent of social change. The policy of the journal is that it does not publish opinion pieces. The purpose of the narrative essay is to "tell a story" (which by the way you do very well in the first part of the essay). We would be happy to consider a resubmission in which you continue in this vein, examining on a personal level whether you should have kept silent or intervened on behalf of your patient; and how you might have done so such that the mother did not feel judged. You might be able to make some of the same points, but from a more personal perspective. (Please note, however, it is not entirely accurate that physicians are restricted to "healing wounds" in cases of domestic violence and female genital mutilation. In fact, in most states physicians are required to report DVV, and are expected to counsel patients about protecting themselves and their children. Reporting of FGM is mandated in the UK, although not yet in the US, but ACOG and AAP have both taken zero tolerance positions against FGM, and AAFP specifically states "Family physicians are encouraged to provide culturally sensitive counseling and education to the patient and her family members about the negative physical and emotional consequences of the procedure and discourage them from having the procedure performed").

Should you decide to resubmit, please keep in mind that the journal has a strict 1000 word limit for the narrative essay section, so make sure that the essay does not exceed this restriction. Finally, we recommend that you have a colleague review the essay to ensure that writing style, grammar, punctuation, and word choice are standard.

Thank you again for your efforts to call attention to this issue.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This essay, under a different title (Agents of Change), was a Reject & Resubmit because it was essentially an opinion piece constructed around a personal narrative. Unfortunately, the revised article has many problems, as reviewer 1 notes (reviewer 2 did not deliver a very useful review). The writing is awkward and ungrammatical (I suspect ESL is an issue). More seriously, the author (whom I believe to be a practicing family doc, not a resident or volunteer as the reviewer concludes) seems unaware of her own implicit biases and very wrapped up in her horror at the young patient's looming marriage (which to me is pretty horrible too, I have to admit, but the point of the essay should not be cultural condemnation, but careful and nuanced reflection). Basically, this is an excellent topic, but addressed in a poorly written and not very insightful manner. It could probably be retrieved with a lot of work on the author's part (and mine!). However, given that we are trying to reject more narrative essays, this is one that is on the fence, and my recommendation is that we do not accept it.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this submission. We recognize the attention you've put into revising, and appreciate that the essay is now more of a narrative rather than an opinion piece. You've tackled a truly important topic for which we commend you. However, in light of reviewer concerns, we have decided not to accept the essay. Thank you again for your efforts to reflect honestly on what surely had to have been a difficult and distressing exchange.