

## FM REVIEW 2016 6 COMMENTS

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** This essay describes a little told aspect of the immigrant patient's experience - the distress and stress resulting in somatic complaints that can arise when an immigrant brings relatives from the old country to reunite the family and discovers unexpected problems. The author is particularly empathic to the struggle of her patient because she herself is an immigrant. I was interested in the topic and appreciated the author's sensitivity to the whole person approach needed in such clinical encounters. I regret that the essay itself is poorly written (English as a second language may be an issue) and, although the author clearly values storytelling, does not tell an engaging story. The metaphor of "black, white, and invisible" just didn't work for me. There is so much wrong with it, including way too much detail about the patient's complaints about her mother and way too little insight about what this patient taught her doctor, that I think this the best course is immediate rejection.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Thank you for this submission. You are clearly a dedicated and sensitive family physician who knows the value of storytelling. This story about an immigrant patient whose unexpected struggles with her mother from the old country resonated with your own personal and professional experiences is a valuable one. Unfortunately, however, we must reject many worthy submissions. We encourage you to keep sharing stories with patients, students, and residents.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** This essay is a resubmission of an earlier essay that was rejected titled something like "Black, White, Invisible." It is much improved over the original, especially in the writing style. It tells a touching story of the limitations of caring for immigrant patients, many of whom have suffered indescribable trauma in fleeing their countries of origin. Both reviewers liked the essay quite a bit and recommended only minor changes. I agree with their suggestions, and have made some edits eliminating the introductory material and tightening some of the dialogue. From my perspective, the biggest shortcoming of the essay is its opacity regarding the narrator. We learn something about the patient, but almost nothing about the physician telling the story. From the concluding lines, we intuit some of her wrestling with how she can adequately care for this patient, but this aspect of the essay could be strengthened. Once this is accomplished, I think this will be a fine essay.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II:** This is a poignant story about the difficulties of adequately caring for immigrant patients, many of whom have suffered indescribable trauma in fleeing their countries. We recognize this as a reworking of an earlier submission "Black, White, Invisible," and commend you for the thoughtful efforts to improve on that original essay.

Please note minor suggestions from reviewers in terms of eliminating the introductory material and tightening the dialogue. I've included an edited ms with some suggestions for how to do this. Please take a look at this; and please remove italics from your dialogue (there is no need for this).

My main concern has to do with the relative opacity of the essay regarding the narrator. To be sure, the narrative essay tries to tell a story about a patient, but inevitably much of its power comes from telling a story about the physician as well. It is hard to know how you feel about your interactions with this patient. What is it like to receive her horrific story? Does your own life story intersect with hers in any ways? At times do you feel inadequate/helpless in terms of what you can do to help her? Knowing that she was separated from her 6 children who were in danger, what was it like to give her a ticket for the food pantry and a phone card (necessary but not sufficient)? From the concluding lines, we intuit some of your wrestling with how you can meet the needs of this patient, but this aspect of the essay could be strengthened. Show us not only your patient, but something of yourself. Look for specific places in the essay where you can add a few lines to help us see, as your patient requests, what is in your heart.