

FM REVIEW 2016 8 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay describes the helplessness of a physician who sees her patient spiraling down as a result not only of disease but of poverty, drug abuse, and societal indifference. It is written in the form of a letter to the (now dead) patient, which I found innovative and personal. The writing is strong, understated yet with a good eye for detail. Reviewers felt, rightly, that there was not enough in-depth personal reflection. I suspect that with another effort, this author will be able to deliver a more introspective, insightful, and self-revealing essay. I recommend major revision.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: There is much to like in this essay, which highlights the socioeconomic and societal conditions that provide fertile ground for diseases such as AIDS and drug abuse. The letter format to a (now dead) patient is innovative and personal. The writing is strong, understated yet with a good eye for detail. However, the essay also falls short in certain ways. Specifically, both reviewers and assistant editor feel that there is not enough personal introspection or insight. How did you feel about your relative helplessness in the face of this patient's overwhelming problems? Without being maudlin or self-indulgent, readers need to feel a bit more of your own anguish at this situation. They need to be emotionally engaged by the narrative.

Remember that the narrative essay tells a story more about you, the narrator, than about the patient. Its focus should be how the experience of caring for Juan affected you. Did it change the way you practice or interact with patients? Since you are already at the section word limit, you may have to make some cuts in order to address these concerns. As reviewer 2 suggests, the 2nd paragraph probably has too much medical/patient history that may not be relevant to your main point. Also, the stories about the mother and brother could either be condensed or eliminated. If you retain this material, think about what point you are trying to convey. Please consult attached for suggestions about where to cut, consolidate, and add more reflective insight.

The last paragraph is superb - eloquent and authentic. We'd like to see more of this level of writing in the essay.

We look forward to receiving a revision of this manuscript.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: I recommend that we accept this revised essay, which won 2nd place in the STFM Poetry and Prose Writing Contest. In response to reviewer and editor suggestions, the author has made many changes, mostly of a minor, stylistic nature, but also including delete a section that seemed tangential to readers; and adding more personal material to show the effect caring for this patient had on the author. The essay's lack of easy resolution is a poignant reminder that the complex intersection of disease, poverty, and social disadvantage is not easy to solve. The author knows how to tell a compelling story and does so beautifully.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for the revisions, deletions, and additions of a personal nature, which offer the reader a window into the soul of the narrator. I like the new title - it expresses both the narrator's humility and frustration. The essay's lack of easy resolution is a poignant reminder that

the complex intersection of disease, poverty, and social disadvantage is not easy to solve. You know how to tell a compelling story and you do so beautifully.