

FINAL TOUCHES PHILLIPS COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay received Honorable Mention in the STFM Writing Award Contest. It tells the classic story of a family doc's professional relationship with an Indian couple, including dimensions of continuity of care, cultural sensitivity, and ushering one through end of life. Reviewers and I liked it. It is well-written and touching. However, there was agreement that what makes this story unique is not so much the narrative of a good death, but how important cultural details reintroduced by a caring family physician contributed to this good death. I think a rebalancing of the story will help foreground this message.

One further concern raised by reviewer 2 is that she feels the level of details disclosed might require a letter of permission from the surviving patient. The specific information about the couple, their religion, their histories, and their religious practices might well justify such a request. What do you think?

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Both reviewers and editor liked this story which epitomizes all that is best in family medicine - continuity of care, cultural sensitivity, and meaningful end of life care. It is well written and touching. What makes this story unique is not so much its recounting of a good death; but how the physician-narrator reintroduces an important cultural detail that makes this "good death" possible. In order to make this point more clearly, we recommend you do several things:

1) The story of the encounter with this husband and wife is the heart of the essay. Either start with this immediately, or collapse the two introductory paragraphs.

2) The metaphor of the tapestry has potential because of the fact that the sudrah/sudreh (check spelling, you use both) is woven cloth. Try to make this connection clearer if you decide to retain the metaphor. Also, you might consider returning to the metaphor in your concluding paragraph.

3) I understand your reference to "the master" (as in master weaver), but it might come across as somewhat arrogant. You can make the same point without this particular word. In fact, that entire sentence may be superfluous.

4) It is the detail of the sudreh that makes this story so compelling. Maybe highlight this a bit more throughout. Possibly you noticed this piece of cloth when you examined Mr. Mistry on the visit that led to his fatal diagnosis? How did you know later that "something was not quite right"? Maybe you can reflect on this more deeply. What is it about the way you care for your patients that allowed you to remember this seemingly small detail?

5) I tend to agree with reviewer 1 that the last lines are not necessary. You could very easily end with the preceding paragraph about questions and details.

6) Reviewer 1 requests that you reflect further on the essay's "take home" message. While we don't want you to hit readers over the head, essays in this section do tend to be somewhat explicit in examining "what was learned." As reviewer 1 asks, how will this interaction affect our practice in the future? What existing awareness of the art of medicine is reinforced? Did it lead to new insights?

Along similar lines, reviewer 2 wonders how your approach distinguishes you from other specialties; maybe you could weave in this thread? Maybe this simple story of the sudreh was a reminder of what it means to be a family doctor.

With some revisions that emphasize the importance of personal knowledge in the doctor-patient encounter and how you as a family doctor are able to elicit and recognize the meaning of this knowledge, this essay will make a valuable contribution to the journal.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This essay uses the metaphor of a weaving to examine how a family physician is always pulling threads together on multiple levels to render compassionate, attentive care to patients. In this case, the patient is facing his death, and the last act of his physician focuses on cultural sensitivity rather than medications. It is a well-written and well-observed piece that won Honorable Mention in the STFM Creative Writing Contest.

The author has done a careful job of addressing reviewer and editorial concerns. For example, he reworked the beginning so that the narrative about the patient begins sooner. He has also clarified how the care he delivered is emblematic of how family physicians work with patients; and how it differs from the contributions of other specialists. He reduced clinical information, eliminated or rewrote certain sections, and worked more within the weaving metaphor.

On pg.3 , line 52, there is a "the" missing (before "patient's") which should be inserted.

I have also reviewed in detail and corresponded with Dr. Phillips about the issue of patient confidentiality and anonymity. I am reassured that, in this case, both patients are deceased. The incident also occurred many years ago, so it seems unlikely that remaining family members could identify their relatives based on the essay as written. The author feels he has done what he can to protect their anonymity, and has thought seriously about this issue. I'm satisfied that he has taken necessary steps and that the essay should be published as written.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for your careful attention to reviewer and editor comments. The revisions you made are excellent, and address all concerns and questions. We really liked the way you plunge the reader instantly into the patient story. The metaphor of "weaving the threads" of patients' lives works very well; and ties in beautifully with the ways in which you've highlighted unique aspects of family medicine practice and distinguished it from other specialties. The concluding lines "tie" everything together and are quite moving.

Thank you also for your correspondence regarding patient confidentiality and anonymity. As I noted in our exchange, these issues are not always clear-cut; and you've clearly considered this question very thoughtfully and with regard for your former patients. Because your patients are both deceased, and because this incident occurred many years ago, I agree with you that it is unlikely for their identity to be discovered. I appreciate the care you took to consider this issue.