

FM REVIEW 2016 7 COMMENTS:

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay uses a well-known (but perhaps now forgotten) analogy by Ian McWhinney between tending to cow herds and tending to humans to consider the tension between population and person health and wellbeing. We discussed this essay when first submitted, and we agreed that because of the eminence of the authors, we would send it out for review. Neither reviewer was very enthusiastic, and both recommend major revision (the second reviewer is pessimistic that anything new can be added to McWhinney's original happy metaphor. The first reviewer gets to the heart of the matter by observing that the essay is mostly a rehashing of others' already well-stated ideas on this topic; and does not really tell a personal story.

Basically, the essay is an opinion piece about the importance of balancing the fundamentals of population medicine with attention and care to the health of individual persons. Of course, anyone in Family Medicine would endorse this message, and that is part of the problem: it is not a highly original insight. The only thing that could make the essay interesting enough to publish is that the stories of the authors are vibrant and compelling, which unfortunately in their present guise they are not.

My recommendation is that we give the authors an opportunity to rewrite, referring briefly to McWhinney's analogy, but providing a more compelling central story from each of the authors. These stories should be told in the first person, should eschew the prescriptive tone that characterizes the essay, should attempt to be memorable in the minds of readers, and should focus on personal (not specialty) lessons learned. In particular, authors should be encouraged to figure out how their farming stories add anything to the original McWhinney/Schumaker cow comparison.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this essay, and for reminding us of Ian McWhinney's always spot-on and relevant homespun insights. We are interested in your piece, but feel it needs extensive reworking to be a good fit as a narrative essay. As it stands now, it is too much a representation of others' ideas, too much an opinion piece, lacking a strong narrative spine. The journal's policy is not to publish opinion pieces, no matter how much we might endorse the perspective represented. Rather, the narrative essay section is intended to share a compelling personal story about which the reader can reach his or her own conclusion.

Therefore, a revision needs to be organized around a central evocative story (or two) that offer insights into the tension between population medicine and the family physician's commitment to each individual patient. You are quite right in observing that most of the journal readers (although by no means all) practice in urban/suburban settings. For this reason, you must make a concerted effort to bring your stories about cows and turkeys to life. It might be more effective to describe a particular encounter, rather than talk in generalities.

Also, because of the excellence of McWhinney's original analogy, please highlight the ways in which your own farming experiences extend and deepen his original insight. Ideally, you want to say something beyond, "Our cows and turkeys showed us that McWhinney was right." Instead, reflect on

what was it about your encounters with these farm animals that underlined, intensified, made more relevant McWhinney's story.

By building on McWhinney's retelling of Schumaker and by telling your own stories that emotionally engage readers, you will have an essay that encourages family docs to think about their own practices even when they are far from the farm.