

FM REVIEW 2017 12 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay tells an interesting story about a family physician's encounter with an autistic young man. The reviewers found merit in it. In my view, it will take considerable work to make it a clear and compelling essay, but I think we should give the author a chance to do so. The 3 main problems I see is that 1) The purpose of the essay is not clear 2) The writing is very literal and ponderous 3) The author has chosen to insert italicized commentary that seems to either be trying to convey information about patients with autism or to make recommendations to other physicians caring for patients with autism; but which in either case is distracting and inappropriate. I've tried to provide some guidance for revision below.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: We appreciate the topic of this essay, as family physicians' interactions with patients with disabilities, and in particular autism, do not receive much attention, especially in narrative form. The essay shows potential, but also requires significant revision. If you are willing to undertake this effort, please focus on the following:

1) The point of the essay is not clear. Is it to explore your growing interest in the population of individuals on the spectrum? Is it to highlight the patient's self-acceptance (the most powerful part of the piece, including the rippling effect of his disclosure)? 3) Is it to show an effective interaction with a patient with autism? If you are clearer on the purpose of this essay, it should help you focus the writing.

2) It is not clear why you were uncomfortable discussing the patient's depression, as I imagine this is something you do often with patients in a primary care setting. Is it the confluence of autism and depression? Help the reader understand your hesitation, and help show WHY you decided to "change course" (what would have been your usual course?).

3) The asterisked, italicized sections are distracting in what is supposed to be a personal reflection, written in a non-didactic style. Sometimes you seem to be trying to convey information about patients with autism and sometimes it appears you are making recommendations to other physicians caring for patients with autism. Regardless, this commentary is not appropriate for a narrative essay. Please rework these sentences so that they are describing your thinking or feelings. Please avoid "prescriptions" for other physicians as this verges into opinion, which as a matter of policy we do not publish. (In that regard, please ignore reviewer requests for more factual information about autism and for generalizations about how physicians should interact with these patients. These are very important topics, but the narrative essay is not the proper place for this kind of material).

4) As above, the highlight of the essay is the patient's self-disclosure and its aftermath. So many people were so happy on hearing the patient's words. For his parents, the reason seems obvious. For you and your nurse, help us see why you both were so moved. Might it be related to preconceived assumptions about a patient with autism? I suspect it could have something to do with connection and acceptance of difference, but try to shed some light on why this event was so powerful, especially for you.

5) Overall, it would be helpful if the essay could show a little more of yourself. You state that you have a growing interest in patients with spectrum disorders, but don't let us see why. You are reluctant to assess the patient's depression, but again, help us understand why. You are deeply moved by the patient's positive affirmation, but show us what this means for you.

6) The writing tends to be a bit clunky in places. Please consider having a colleague read it from a literary viewpoint for minor editorial suggestions.

Thank you for sharing this story.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: The author has done a very thorough job of revising this essay along the lines suggested by reviewers and assistant editor. The advice about caring for patients with autism has been transformed into personal statements that are much more in line with a narrative essay. The central event of the essay - the patient's self-acceptance and his ability to share this with his new physician - is better highlighted. The author is more revealing about his own motivations, thoughts, and feelings, which helps to humanize the essay. The writing has been much improved as well. I recommend we accept this piece as an example of how family docs can be important supports and advocates for patients with disabilities.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for such an excellent revision. The briefer title is more intriguing. The elimination of the italicized asterisks and instead putting these statements in your own voice sounds more natural and flows much better. The essay is better organized around the central event of your patient's self-acceptance and sharing that self-acceptance with you, his physician. Your self-disclosures both about your work with patients with disabilities, and your own joy in your patient's breakthrough make the essay at once more interesting and more human. Overall, this piece is now a lovely example of how family docs can be important supports and advocates for patients with disabilities.