

FM REVIEW 2017 23 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay by an experienced behavioral scientist that makes the case for continuing to teach family-based skills in family medicine. He illustrates this need through a poignant personal story of attending a family conference for EoL planning for his own father. Both reviewers liked the essay a lot, as do I. The problem, from my perspective, is that when the essay is not telling the author's personal story, it is an opinion piece about the need for teaching family skills. It even includes a prescription for structuring a family conference and for being a successful facilitator. Unfortunately, this sort of information is really not appropriate in a narrative essay. I discuss this issue in my comments to the author and have made suggestions on the edited version attached about how he might modify the text.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this essay. It is an important reminder that family-based skills remain important in the context of clinical care. It is well written and the story of the family conference regarding your own father is at once poignant and instructive.

The issue we must grapple with has less to do with your essay per se than with the boundaries of the narrative essay section. It is journal policy not to publish opinion pieces, no matter how much we might agree with their content. Therefore, we do not accept submissions that advocate a particular position for the specialty as a whole ("we must continue to incorporate teaching about family skills in training").

The narrative essay is intended to tell a particular, personal story. Thus, the core of your essay is perfect and should not be changed in any way. However, following the story itself the essay becomes prescriptive, offering guidance in terms of structuring and facilitating family conferences. This type of advocacy is not a good fit for the narrative essay. Rather, we look for what the author learned or how the author was changed as a result of the experience described.

I think there are ways that you can rework the material surrounding the story of your dad's family conference to focus on your own needs and those of your siblings. Some of these are suggested on the attached. I also think you might share how this experience with your father at the end of his life has influenced your own teaching and interactions with patients. This approach will be more compatible with the parameters of this section and hopefully will still preserve the message you wish to convey.

Finally, please remember that since you are sharing your story, the more you can help the reader understand feelingly your experience, the more effective that story will be. Let us into your world a little - what was it like to be sitting on the other side of the table, so to speak? What were your thoughts and feelings? What changed for you after you took charge and commandeered the facilitator role? What was the reaction of your siblings? Were they surprised, appreciative?

We hope you are willing to revise along these lines as we feel this essay will make a valuable and indeed much-needed contribution to the journal.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay tackles an important topic, I suspect one especially dear to "old-time" behavioral scientists trained in the importance of family dynamics. In this case, the author, himself a well-respected behavioral scientist, recounts the difficult family conference in which he participated while determining the appropriate care for what turned out to be the last week of his father's life.

In this revision, both concerns have been successfully addressed. The essay now restricts itself to telling a personal story, and is the more compelling because of this narrower scope. As well, the author is able to create a sense of how he and his sibling were distressed not so much by the impending death of their father which was expected but by the inefficiency, lack of focus, and absence of a clear plan resulting from the family meeting. I recommend acceptance.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this careful revision, which does an excellent job of addressing reviewers' and editor's concerns. The essay now restricts itself to telling a personal story, and is the more compelling because of this narrower scope. As well, you convey in an understated but moving manner a sense of how you and your sibling were distressed not so much by the impending death of your father (about which you felt you'd made the right decisions), but by the inefficiency, lack of focus, and absence of a clear plan resulting from the family meeting. The final paragraph stating your recommitment to the importance of teaching about this topic is very effective in showing a powerful intersection of the personal and the professional. I think many readers will be reminded of the importance of a well-organized and humane family meeting as a result of your essay.