

## FM REVIEW 2017 25 COMMENTS

### Comments to the Author:

This is an intriguing essay about the distinct yet overlapping roles of physician and clergy; and about the importance of symbol and ritual in medicine, and how these are threatened by encroaching technology.. We are interested in your work, but feel it requires a major rewrite.

There are two primary issues that need to be addressed to improve the essay:

1) The two points noted above are not adequately integrated. Because of its brief length, a narrative essay is most effective when it makes a single point. In your essay, it is not exactly clear how the roles of physician and clergy are related to the symbols/rituals of medicine. For example, you might be saying that although the stethoscope or laying on of hands technically are symbols/rituals that "belong" to medicine, they often communicate a spiritual dimension of healing and caring. Or you might be saying that your time as a seminarian taught you the value of symbols and how to use them to enhance trust and caring. You also discuss parallels between the ministry and physicianhood, which is insightful and interesting, but does not explain what this has to do with symbols in medicine. Overall, it is not completely obvious how the different strands of the essay fit together.

2) The purpose of the narrative essay is to tell a compelling story, and to let the reader draw his or her own conclusions. The journal does not publish opinion pieces, so when you veer into pronouncements about technology overpowering the doctor-patient relationship; or exhort the profession to retain its humanistic roots, you are offering opinions, and we must request that you stick to your personal stories, and what you as an individual physician might have learned from them. You have two exceptionally meaningful stories in this essay. They are emotionally involving and worth telling. You could beneficially elaborate on each by revealing a little more of your own reactions in each case - after all, it is impossible to tell a patient's story without telling your own story as well. How were you affected by each encounter? How did it change/deepen the way you make use of symbols/rituals in medicine? Did these interactions alter the way you think about yourself as both physician and clergy?

Additional suggestions are in the attached file. We hope you will consider revising this essay to accommodate these two issues. Thank you.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This essay is moving in the right direction, but it is still not completely clear on what it is saying. The main point is that medicine has powerful symbols and rituals of healing at its disposal. They facilitate not only key medical moments but also promote healing. But the essay takes a detour in its discussion of the overlapping roles of the author as both physician and clergy. Below I try to help him untangle this issue so that the essay's message is conveyed clearly.**

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this revision, which has helped to focus the essay and make it more personal. It is almost there, but I still find a persisting point of confusion which I hope you can clarify.**

As I reread the essay to me the main point is that medicine has powerful symbols and rituals that can be used not merely to advance the goals of biomedicine (i.e., listen to a heartbeat, ascertain that a patient is dead) but also can convey messages of healing and hope. Your two examples make this point in a compelling and moving manner. In the last few paragraphs, you suggest that the symbols and rituals of medicine may be changing (tapping on a keyboard, staring at a screen) and you ponder the implications for your profession and yourself as a physician.

This all works perfectly and coheres very well. There is a clear through-line. But the section in which you talk about yourself as a physician and as a clergy strikes me as a detour. I understand that you learned about the power of ritual and symbols not only from medicine, but from the priesthood as well. This makes sense, and I think could be included. But the reasons for including your patients' and sometimes your own confusion about which role you are fulfilling at certain moments; and the fact that the symbol you wear (collar vs. stethoscope) determines the outward perception (although not necessarily the inward perception) escape me. This seems as though it belongs in a different essay entirely.

Puzzling through this issue, I see that the "commonality" of the various rituals you engage in all have to do with healing. Perhaps your line of argument is that when you are in the clergy role, you are only an emotional/spiritual healer; and part of this healing is communicated through your symbols and ritual objects. You've realized that as a physician, you sometimes tap into the same sort of healing, only using different although equally powerful symbols and rituals.

I hope this is a fair summary of what you want to say in this essay. I think that by reworking paragraph 2 pg 2 and paragraph 2 pg 3 that talk about your different roles and your own occasional role confusion; and emphasizing the healing properties of medical symbols/rituals, the essay should come together in an articulate and well-reasoned manner.

I've made a few minor edits in the text as well (attached). I also wonder whether you could consider modifying the title: simply "Symbols and Rituals of Healing" (I think your essay "shows" the power); or perhaps even more provocatively, "What Is Happening to our Symbols of Healing?" Please play around with other title ideas of your own.

Thank you for this added effort, which I think will heighten its impact for readers.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has made a good faith effort to address concerns regarding his point about being both a physician and a clergy is filtered through the different symbols and rituals each profession employs. He has also done a conscientious job of deleting material that was not germane to the main thrust of this essay. He has also clarified his perspective on changing symbols in medicine and how that might affect his relationship with patients. Finally, he has made the essay more personal; it no longer holds forth regarding the future of the specialty as a whole. I think this essay has gone as far as it can and I recommend its publication.

Please note - in the pdf, p.2 line 14, "breathe" should be "breath." There are a few examples of lack of spacing toward the end of the ms that should be corrected in copy editing.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you for the numerous edits, deletions, and overall reworking in this version. I appreciate the care and craft you put in to the rewriting of the essay. The title I feel is an improvement. Your point about how being both a physician and a clergy is filtered through the different symbols and rituals each profession employs is much more clearly tied to the opening narrative.. Thank you for doing such a conscientious job of deleting material that was not germane to the main thrust of the essay. Thank you also for making crisper your perspective on changing symbols in medicine and how that might affect your relationship with patients. Finally, the essay is now more personal, and as a result, I believe, more compelling. I think your reflections will provide much food for thought for our readers.