

FM REVIEW 2017 32 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay has a touching core - the story of the physician-narrator's father's descent into Alzheimer's and the way his grandson's music was able to reach and reconnect him. It is encumbered by many research references that interrupt the narrative flow; and it fails to sufficiently connect the narrator's personal experience with insights applicable to patient care or teaching. It also lacks the emotional intensity one would expect from such a personally powerful story. I recommend allowing the author to do a major revision to see if she can chisel away the surrounding stone to reveal the moving statue hidden within.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This story shares a touching personal anecdote about reconnecting with the narrator's father who suffers from Alzheimer's disease through the grandson's music. It is a simple lovely story that deserves to be told. However, it needs extensive revision to bring out the purity of its essential message.

1) The main title sounds very clinical - Coping with Dementia. Think about making this more personal. The subtitle is really good - intriguing, it draws the reader in, makes them want to understand what it refers to.

2) Paragraphs 2 and 3 do not fit in a narrative essay, which is intended to tell a personal story. These should simply be deleted. Don't talk about research findings; instead talk about your father. Similarly, if you refer to the Broton study at all, mention it as you would in casual conversation: "I knew of some research showing the beneficial effects of music on patients with Alzheimer's... but it did not prepare me for what happened when my son played for my father."

3) There is really no need to mention a proprietary treatment program, such as Music and Memory, in the essay.

4) Use the additional words you acquired from the above cuts to discuss more thoroughly how this experience shaped your encounters with patients with AD and their families. You allude to this in the second to last paragraph, but it would strengthen the essay to show how your particular experience has given you greater empathy or understanding of what families endure. Maybe you could say something about how patients/families react to your more personal sharing.

5) One reviewer noted with surprise that the essay was not more moving given its subject matter. I think this may be because while you describe events (your father wandering away, the family conferences), you do not allow us to see the family's anguish - and your own. I am reluctant to ask you to go beyond your comfort level, but perhaps you could show, rather than tell, a bit of the suffering your family went through, readers could relate to the emotional dimension of your journey.

6) Similarly, while you describe in detail the effect of music on your father, you do not mention how your grandson felt or how you felt to witness this transformation. Again, please consider incorporating these perspectives into your essay.

These changes will help to focus the essay on its central theme – which is, in my read, how his grandson’s music brought your father back into some sort of connection with the family; and how seeing this influenced the way you cared for patients with dementia. This is the story you should be telling.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: The author is on the right track with this revision, which has reduced the disjuncture between the narrative style of the essay and reversions into data-based, academic statements. It also is a little more personal. Its strength lies in the description of how the author's experience informed the way she cared for and treated patients with Alzheimer's Disease. Nevertheless, the writing remains ungainly in many places, and the essay would benefit from a stronger personal presence by the author. I've done a close line-by-line editing, to give the author specific stylistic guidance. I've also recommended deleting still more of the factual statements about AD, and suggested more personal disclosure.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this improved version of your essay. The title is moving in the right direction. We also appreciate your removing many of the more academic portions, while adding more discussion of how you and your son were affected by your father's reaction to your son's music. The essay is strongest when it is sharing these personal insights; and when it discusses how your personal experience informed the way you care for and treat patients with AD. We would like to request that you continue to work on further revision along the following lines:

- 1) While improved, the title is still rather abstract. "Struggles with Dementia" - whose struggles? What kinds of struggles? I've offered a possible alternative, but please consider for yourself a modification that pleases you but is more specific and grounded.
- 2) I recommend you remove the citations about different types of dementia as well as statistics about prevalence and cost. This information does not belong in a narrative essay.
- 3) The discussion of your father's lack of improvement from medication is honest and valuable. Linking it to your patients' experiences is terrific. This is a strong paragraph.
- 4) The addition of your son's response is also very good. If you can elaborate further through other details, please do so.
- 5) Along these lines, this would be a good place to show your own reaction to the change in your father. Did you feel more connected with him in some way, even though he still didn't recognize you? Did you feel joy at his pleasure in the music? Please let the reader see a bit more of who you are.
- 6) I felt the essay needed a last line to "interpret" the Oscar Wilde quote in the context of your particular experience. Please feel to rewrite as you wish.
- 7) The writing style is sometimes a bit awkward, favoring the passive voice or using maladroit constructions. Please see line editing for suggestions as to how you can polish your prose.

8) Finally, you have plenty of space available (170 words) in which to help the reader understand more deeply what this experience with your father was like for you and your family. I hope you will consider taking the plunge.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: This is the second revision of an essay about the physician-narrator's journey with her father's Alzheimer's Disease and how her discoveries influenced her care of patients with dementia. The essay is more emotive and more focused on patient care than in its original version. I am checking "minor revision" only because in places the writing style is still rather graceless, and I've suggested small ways of rephrasing that I hope have better flow. The essay should be ready to accept once the author approves these minor changes, or makes improvements of her own.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you for your excellent revisions. You have conscientiously addressed editorial concerns, and the result is a moving essay that clearly shows how the personal and the professional can intersect to the benefit of both. In reading this version, I noticed a couple of sentences that did not seem to flow smoothly. I've suggested minor revisions. Please either accept these, or make improvements of your own. We are looking forward to publishing your essay in Family Medicine.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: Author has made all suggested, minor changes. She has also come up with a new title that fits the essay better than either the original (or my suggestion!). I recommend we accept this essay.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for these final revisions. The essay reads very well and tells a moving story. I continue to appreciate how your personal experience informed your view of your patients with dementia. I also like your new title, and agree it is a good fit with the overall theme of the essay. Lots of hard work went into this effort and the result is a meaningful story that will capture readers' thoughts - and hopefully hearts as well.