

FM REVIEW 2018 3 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is an essay that uses a clever, breezy style to share the author's experiences using automobile metaphors in clinical practice. There is actually a fair amount written about metaphors in medicine; perhaps wisely, given the word limitations, in this essay the author restricts himself to a single category - car metaphors. However, despite my enjoyment of the essay, it has several significant problems, which the reviewers also highlight. I enumerate these below. Given the enjoyableness of reading this essay, and the author's good narrative skills, I think he should be given the opportunity to deepen his thinking and make the essay more substantive.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR; Thank you for this well-written essay. We enjoyed its breezy style, the affectionate anecdotes, and the obvious bond you create with your patients through metaphor. The title is a perfect fit for the content.

However, before considering the essay further, we recommend a major revision that addresses the following points:

1) As reviewer 1 notes, although you mention that "car guys" can be women, the "feel" of the essay is very male. All your examples are men talking to men. It would help, I think, if one of your examples involved a female patient.

2) The last line about the death of your patient comes across as flippant, although I'm sure that was not your intent. It's funny, but in an uncomfortable way. It's not all about the car. Please look for some way in which you can express your sorrow at the loss of this apparently very congenial man, while noting that he achieved his car-related goal.

3) You note that metaphors have both benefits and risks in medicine. The narrative essay is not the place for a disquisition about metaphor in the abstract; but it might balance your essay to share an example of when a metaphor didn't work, or where it confused a patient, i.e., something illustrating the limitations of metaphor. Obviously car metaphors are very mechanistic. There's been pushback about NOT treating patients like automobiles and doctors like car mechanics. Maybe you can reflect on the paradox that talking about the patient as a machine actually can draw you closer to some patients; while acknowledging the importance of remembering that patients are not cars, and holistically treating the suffering human is more complex than auto repair.

4) Given the word limitations of this section, it is probably a good choice to restrict yourself to a single category of metaphor (the car metaphor). However, it might help broaden the article to mention in passing other metaphors you've experimented with, and their relative degree of success or failure.

5) Finally, the narrative essay is intended to highlight some learning or insight that has occurred for the author. Your next to last paragraph is an excellent start in this direction. Maybe you can elaborate just a bit on the final sentence. Why does talking about cars build trust? Why does it add meaning to clinical practice? Why is it fun?

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: Excellent revision! This author is a really good writer, and the tone of the piece is appealingly lighthearted and clever. The author works very well within the "car metaphor," with allusions to metaphors "going flat," or "backfiring." He has also addressed a perceived gender bias in the essay, and clarified that "car guys" can be men and women. The section on risks of metaphors is nicely developed, while not sacrificing the piece's overall style; and the author similarly acknowledges that car metaphors should not be used reductively in patient care. The concluding description of the death of a patient (appropriately, through yet another car metaphor) has been rewritten so that it shows the physician's personal knowledge of the patient; rather than flippant, it is touching. Finally, the author has drawn (subtly) some lessons learned from the use of car metaphors that have to do with building trust with patients, finding meaning, and having fun in the practice of medicine. Very well done!

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this excellent revision! You are a really strong writer, and the tone of the piece is appealingly lighthearted and clever. You work very well within your chosen metaphor, with allusions to metaphors "going flat," or "backfiring." You've also successfully addressed the issue of perceived gender bias in the essay by clarifying that "car guys" can be both men and women. The section on risks of metaphors is now nicely developed, while not sacrificing the piece's overall style; and you acknowledge that car metaphors should not be used reductively in patient care. The concluding description of the death of a patient (appropriately, through yet another car metaphor) in this version shows your significant personal knowledge of the patient. Rather than flippant, the ending is quite touching, while remaining consistent with the metaphor. Finally, I agree that lessons learned about the value of metaphors in building trust with patients, helping physicians to find meaning, and having fun in the practice of medicine are all present, without hitting the reader over the head with them. The essay was a pleasure to read!