

## FM REVIEW 2018 41 COMMENTS

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** This essay, written by a resident, discusses the illness and death of his father from pancreatic cancer. Its focus is how the experience contributed to his education; and in particular, how insensitively he felt the oncologist handled the issues of transition to hospice and end of life care (as in not at all). Overall, it is a very good essay, and like reviewer 1, I like to encourage essays by residents. The last paragraphs are written as an opinion about how doctors in general need to demonstrate more honesty and more care at end of life. These will need to be revised to tell more of a personal story. I think the essay shows promise and with some revision will provide an important commentary on the difficult balance between a son of an ill patient and a doctor to many ill patients, and how much each informs the other.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** It is heart-wrenching to read of the loss of your father. Thank you for having the courage to share this story with our readership. It is a moving essay, and overall very well-written and expressive. We would like to request some minor rewriting to make certain points clearer.

1) I agree with reviewer 1 that the word "winning" in the title is confusing. In what sense did you "win" residency? Is it that you survived while going through this terrible ordeal with your father? Is it that you learned how suffering and death can affect families, and this made you a better doctor during this training period? I'd suggest you consider a new title that makes your meaning clearer. To me, the main point of your essay is what you learned, especially about hospice referrals, from your father's experience. Maybe there is the kernel of a new title in this focus.

2) Narrative essays are meant to be personal stories. It is journal policy not to publish opinion, no matter how much we might agree with the opinion expressed. Therefore we discourage authors from making generalizations to the entire specialty, or writing in the first person plural "we." In the concluding two paragraphs, please stick with "I." Talk about what you learned, and how your father's illness and death changed you. Please pay attention to reviewer 1's thoughts about adding a few more sentences to elaborate on this theme.

3) Please see reviewer 1's very thorough editing recommendations as well as the edited document for minor suggestions about wordsmithing and a suggested rewrite of the final paragraphs so that they concentrate on telling your story.

### COMMENTS TO EDITOR:

This essay is essentially about the author's dealing with his father's diagnosis, treatment, and eventual death from pancreatic cancer while in residency, and the lessons he learned as a result. The core of the essay focuses on the insensitive manner in which the oncologist indicated the need to transition to hospice (no direct communication, just having the hospice team show up). The most intriguing part of the essay has to do with the author's trying to balance the roles of son to his father and doctor to his patients. He also wrestles well with his desire to ;to find answers even when there is little cause for hope.

This revision has corrected certain problems, but also created new ones. The writing in this version is quite rough in places, and requires considerable cleaning up. The title is still not quite right; and the organization in places is somewhat haphazard. There is a long paragraph detour about another nonadherent patient which doesn't even seem to belong in this essay.

Therefore, despite a reluctance to indicate Major Revision twice in a row, I feel I have no choice but to do so. I think if the author follows these recommendations, we will end up with a very good, clearly focused essay on the next round.

#### COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:

Thank you for the changes you made, which definitely have improved the essay. On rereading, I still found some stylistic issues for which I've made suggestions on the attached. I'd like to highlight a few more substantive issues in particular:

1) The title is much improved. I understand what you were trying to convey by "winning" residency (not dropping out despite your father's grim prognosis), but the essay is primarily about what you learned as a doctor, not about your struggle to remain in residency. So this title is better. However, the revised title might imply that it was YOUR cancer that taught you to become a better doctor. I think you can correct this easily by modifying the title to read "How My Father's Cancer..."

2) In the second paragraph, p. 1, we'd like you to keep the focus on yourself, rather than residency in general (see how the attached is written in the 1st person).

3) In the third paragraph, there is a sentence about distance and connection in the doctor-patient relationship which I thought was superb. However, it sounds more like a conclusion and doesn't seem to fit where you placed it. I've moved it to the final paragraph.

4) In the fourth paragraph, final line, I love the admission that you wanted to sit with your parents and have some other doctor talk to you with the right words that would reassure and console you. I tried to make this a little clearer, but please revise any way you wish.

5) I was a little confused by the paragraph about the biopsychosocial model. Are you saying that your family needed the balance of the biopsychosocial model as your father approached death? Are you saying that, for your family, your religious faith was an example of the "psychosocial" part of this model? Please look at this paragraph and see if you can't make it a bit clearer.

6) The paragraph about the patient with diabetes and other medical conditions is distracting. In the preceding paragraph, you are discussing hospice and how it was handled badly both with patients and with your own father; and how it could be handled better. Switching away from your father to another patient and changing the topic from hospice to nonadherence is disorienting and confusing. I'd recommend deleting the entire paragraph.

**7) The new material you've added in the second to last paragraph is compelling and honest, and shows transparently your own struggle with how to navigate end of life issues as a son and a physician. I've made some stylistic edits, but it is a really strong paragraph.**

**Please attend to these issues. If you disagree with any recommendations, please offer your own alternative. You are on track to craft a moving and honest essay, so please keep at it.**

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has done an excellent job through 2 revisions of improving the focusing this article on what he learned from his father's struggle with pancreatic cancer and eventual death. The essay reads well, and is honest and affecting. A particularly moving part is his awareness of how the family's faith both gave them unrealistic hope and yet sustained them at the end. I think it is a genuine, heartfelt effort by a young physician that deserves to be published in FM.:**

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Congratulations on your graduation and much good luck in whatever comes next. I appreciate the hard work you've invested in this essay; and I hope you are as pleased with the final product as we are. The juxtaposition of your role as a son and your role as a physician is really well-developed, and every physician reading this will identify. You also offer an important reminder that, in addition to the stresses and strains of residency, residents are often going through very challenging and distressing personal experiences as well.**