

## FM REVIEW 2018 6 COMMENTS

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** Sorry for the long delay on this piece. I first solicited the opinions of 3 reviewers because I was personally so ambivalent about whether it could become a good narrative essay. Unfortunately, the reviews ranged from minor revision to reject. I then asked for X's opinion, who recommended Major Revision, and since represents 2 of 4 opinions, this is what I will go with.

The main problems with the essay is that, while undoubtedly cathartic for the author, it is very raw, filled with unprocessed anger and a recital of Jewish traditions (please remember I am Jewish) that fail to illuminate how these were helpful or consoling as the author claims. There is very little of the author's actual experience. I hope that this lengthy lag in response will have the serendipitous effect of giving the author time to reflect on the heartrending loss of his parents in a way that will make the essay more accessible and more meaningful to readers.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Thank you for this essay, and please accept our condolences for the loss of both your parents, under circumstances that fell so far short of expectations, and only added to your grief. It is always extremely difficult to comment on such a heartrending story from a critical standpoint; nevertheless, since that is the task of editors and reviewers, that is what I will attempt to summarize. I apologize in advance for any apparent "dissecting" of a heartbreaking experience. I hope we are united in making this essay the best possible.

The essay benefits from an excellent, clear, and easily graspable structure: 1) how to pursue healing for you and your family 2) how to address the shortcomings of the physician who cared for your father and 3) how to take what you have learned and bring it into precepting residents and consoling colleagues. What we'd like to see is how you can explore each of these in a personal, yet reflective way.

In terms of the first point you make, as currently written, the essay offers a brief paragraph listing Jewish mourning practices in which you and your family engaged. This paragraph does not really help us understand in what ways these practices were consolatory or meaningful, and to what extent they actually helped (or did not help) with your and your family's coming to term with loss. We need to see the person of you in this section. References to Jewish observance are not necessary, because the purpose of the essay is not to educate non-Jews on mourning practices but rather to show everyone how religious ritual can provide structure, hope, community - or not.

The second section consists primarily of a detailed, angry letter to your father's physician, listing the shortcomings of his care. It is so understandable – and commendable – that you would write such a letter. However, in its specifics, it does not really illuminate the purpose or value of your decision to contact this doctor. A better approach might be to summarize the letter, focusing more on why you wanted to write it, what you hoped the physician would learn from it, and how frustrating it was that the physician did not even respond. Again, the letter itself is not as important as the human being who wrote it, why he wrote it and whether it helped to write it.

In the final section, you cite a book that helped in guiding your interactions with residents and colleagues around death and dying. Again, we don't need the citation so much as a couple of brief examples of how you actually altered or deepened your approach in teaching, clinical care, and collegial support.

Finally, please consider changing the title. As written, it sounds rather didactic and academic. Think of a way to make it more personal, and possibly to better reflect the 3 sections of the essay you've identified.

I want to reiterate that revisiting one's writing with a critical eye on such a deeply personal and intimate topic is extremely challenging. However, I think that when you are able to do so, you will be able to revise this essay in a way that conveys insights and understandings that will benefit us all.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This was a difficult essay to review objectively, as it describes the deaths of the author's aged parents, and the poor medical care they received at the hands of their physicians. Reviews were quite mixed (I solicited 3, and ended up asking Colleen's advice as well). My inclination was to reject it as too angry and too academic, but Colleen thought there was something there, and I think she was right.

After a major revision (despite retaining the footnotes), the essay is more humane and more personal. It has a strong organizational spine, which makes it easy to follow; and the author now engages well with each of the questions he posed himself. It is also very long (1630 words, not all of which are necessary). I don't believe we can get this author to adopt a more conversational tone, but this may not be necessary, as he cannot avoid his own pain and frustration in the writing. He concludes with a strong section on implications for his own teaching, which I suspect readers will find very useful. Overall, if we can persuade the author to make enough cuts to bring the essay closer to the journal's limit, I think it will make a thought-provoking contribution to the journal.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for the very evident effort you put into revising this heart-wrenching and honest essay. Thank you for taking reviewer and editor comments seriously, and thoughtfully addressing them. This version is a much better fit for the journal, and I think will say something very important to our readers about what is necessary from physicians in end of life care. Many specific changes, such as the new title (much better!), the section on AUTO-BATHE (a really relevant model for analyzing your own responses to the distressing, frustrating experience your family endured), and your own efforts to learn more about compassionate care, made a major improvement in the essay.

The main challenge we face now is that the essay as written significantly exceeds the section's limit of 1000 words. I think the essay can be reduced in length without losing the impact of its story or message. In the attached, I have made some suggestions that would bring it in around 1100 words. If you disagree with these, not a problem, but it is important to shorten the essay so that it is closer to the word limit. In particular, I still feel quoting your letter is perhaps too particularistic, and overall not needed given the excellent summary you've now provided of your concerns. I did try to retain

**your final message to your father's physician, because it is constructive and points everyone, including the essay's readers, in a positive direction.**

**Thank you for being willing to go one more round with your essay. It's truly a formidable task to translate such a traumatic experience in such a way that anonymous journal readers can benefit. In my view, you have accomplished this very impressively. Now we need to put it in a form acceptable to the journal.**

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR: The author has made a thorough and nondefensive effort to further revise this ms. He has conscientiously followed all editorial recommendations for editing and tightening this essay. Although the piece is still a bit longer than we normally accept (a little under 1100 words), it started off at over 1600, so a significant amount has been deleted. The essay has an excellent structure and wrestles with 3 important issues in a thoughtful manner - personal grieving, dealing with anger at physicians, and learning how to be a better teacher around death and dying. I think the essay has achieved all that it can and recommend that we accept it.**

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for your work on this essay. It cannot have been easy to subject your very personal thoughts and feelings about your parents' death to analytic inspection, and I greatly appreciated your willingness to keep searching for how best to craft the piece so that its lessons would be maximally meaningful to the journal's readers. The issues you address - personal grieving, dealing with anger at physicians, and learning how to be a better teacher around death and dying - are ones we all need to wrestle with. The essay will make a very valuable contribution to the journal and we are grateful that you have shared your story with us.**