

FM REVIEW 2019 1 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay tells the story of an encounter with an 82 yo mother whose son in his 50s has died from a drug overdose, an addiction that started with prescribed pain meds. After presenting the encounter, the author goes on to reflect on what she learned.

The topic is important and the idea of the essay is good, but realizing an effective essay from this beginning will require additional work. The mother's story are presented in a series of single quotes that are very confusing to read. The final reflections are didactic and seem rather randomly grouped, as if she wrote them down as they popped into her mind. The writing itself is rather clumsy, repetitive in spots, with several grammatical errors. However, with careful revision I think it can achieve what is clearly in the author's mind.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this moving essay. You make the mother's story (not her symptoms)the centerpiece, with the physician in a listening/witnessing role, and I like this juxtaposition, so different from many patient encounters. Reviewers liked the essay as well. However, before it is ready to be published, it will require a fairly extensive revision. Please address the following concerns:

1) The mother's story is told in a series of quoted statements, which are confusing to read. Usually this format indicates two people are conversing. Please remove redundant quotations, and put her narrative in a block, appropriately broken up by indications about what the narrator-physician is thinking and feeling, and by what the narrator observes nonverbally about the patient. This presentation will be much easier to follow.

2) Reviewers and editor agree the concluding paragraph diminishes the power of the earlier story. These sentences seem like thoughts jotted down as they occurred to you. Please rewrite, since the essay does need some sort of conclusion, but don't reach for the broad generalization. Instead, stick with your thoughts and feelings **AT THE TIME**. Did you think about your children, about how vulnerable they - and all of us - are? Did you continue to think about this patient, and whether you helped her, and how you could continue to help her? Did you realize anything that might make you think somewhat differently about patients with opioid addiction?

4) There are several instances of redundant information in the essay or information that is not really relevant to your main point. Stay focused on the story you are telling and make sure each sentence contributes directly to that goal.

5) Sometimes the language attributed to the mother seems very formal and clinical. Read your essay aloud and see how it sounds to your ears.

6) There are some grammatical issues that need to be corrected. Please not punctuation goes inside not outside quotations. Also please try to avoid dashes - they are usually not necessary :-)

These revisions, although they may take some time, will serve the purpose of bringing forth what is a beautiful and compelling story with greater clarity and power. We hope you will undertake them.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: The author has made a conscientious effort at revision, and addressed some of the grammatical and punctuation errors. She has also attempted to streamline her narrative, and removed some redundant or tangential material. She has also rewritten the "sermon" with which the original essay concluded; and substituted a more personal reflection. Nevertheless, the story lacks a strong narrative arc. It is very static, and still full of punctuation errors. I have pointed out these issues to the author and hopefully she can make the necessary revisions.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this conscientious review. You have corrected some of the grammatical and punctuation errors that detracted from the readability of the essay. You have also streamlined your narrative by removing some redundant or tangential material. Further, you have effectively rewritten the "sermon" with which the original essay concluded; and substituted a more personal reflection which works very well.

Nevertheless, the essay requires another pass-through. As written, the story lacks a strong narrative arc. It is very static, with the patient talking and looking at the doctor, and the doctor listening. Try to find the movement of the story, which in my mind is your evolution from helplessness and inadequacy at the start of the encounter to the realization that your silence is the most effective "treatment" possible and exactly what your patient needs.

It would also help to enliven the essay with well-placed similes or metaphors.

Further, I recommend in a few places disclosing your own thoughts and feelings. What was it like to receive this patient's story? How did these feelings change? What was it like for you when the patient issued her warning? This story is as much about you as about your patient.

In the concluding paragraph (which overall I really liked, you refer to your "practices" affecting patients, families, and society. I'm not exactly sure what this means. Are you referring to your medical practice? Please clarify this. Finally, the essay still has some punctuation and spelling errors. (For example, punctuation goes inside not outside quotation marks). It might help to have a colleague review your final manuscript.

This is a touching essay at its core. These suggestions are intended to improve the craft so that your message actualizes its full potential.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has done a good job of paying attention to editorial recommendations and revising her manuscript accordingly. Specifically, she has strengthened the narrative arc of the essay, so it is not so static. She added the occasional metaphor to enliven the writing style. She included a couple of personal disclosures so that the narrator is a bit more present in the story. Finally, the grammatical difficulties have by and large been corrected (and hopefully Sam can handle any that remain). I recommend that the essay be accepted.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you for these conscientious revisions, which I hope you will agree improve the essay. Specifically, you've done a lovely job of strengthening the narrative arc of the essay, so it is not so static. You also added the occasional metaphor and simile to enliven the writing style. Further, you included a couple of personal disclosures so that you are not merely a faceless doctor but are a bit more present in the story. Finally, thank you for addressing the grammatical issues.

This essay will make a fine contribution to our journal, and it is particularly relevant as we continue to struggle with the pervasive opioid crisis.