

FM REVIEW 2019 3 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay describes very well the joys and sorrows of a day in a family doctor's life, from his daughter's birthday to the birth of a child to a likely last birthday of a longstanding terminally ill patient. I like that it acknowledges the importance of the author's own family, as well as the concern and caring he demonstrates for his patients. It is well-written, and only needs a little polishing to be ready for publication.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this excellent essay, which describes very well the joys and sorrows of a day in a family doctor's life, from his daughter's birthday to the birth of a child to a likely last birthday of a longstanding terminally ill patient. I like that it acknowledges the importance of your own family, as well as the concern and caring you demonstrate for your patients. It is well-written, and only needs a little additional polishing.

Please pay attention to reviewer comments as well as the suggested edits attached. As you revise, please keep in mind that you are almost at the word limit for the narrative essay section, so any additions to the text will need to be balanced by equivalent cuts.

Although reviewer 2 makes many excellent suggestions such as including a genogram and elaborating on the father's role in the family dynamics, my judgment is that these are not feasible given space limitations, and would detract from the main focus of your story.

Two points would benefit from an additional sentence or two. You mention in passing that your wife made a successful recovery from non-Hodgkins lymphoma (thanks be to God). While again due to the word restriction, you cannot reflect deeply on transference and countertransference issues, as reviewer 2 urges, this parallelism seems to merit more acknowledgment. What was it like for you to care for a patient with cancer after your wife's experience? How did your experience with your wife benefit your care of your patient? How did it complicate this care?

Secondly, the ending of the essay could be strengthened by the addition of a line which shows why this coincidence of birthdays, of life and death, was so powerful for you. The reader intuitively feels it, but if you could make the impact more explicit, it would make for an even more compelling conclusion.

A more minor issue, noted by reviewer 1, is the excessive reliance on medical terms (these are highlighted in yellow in the attachment). While it is true that many of the readers of the journal are themselves physicians, that does not describe the entirety of our readership; as reviewer 1 notes, s/he felt "lost" with all the technical terminology. Worse, this language tends to make the essay sound like a chart note in places. The purpose of a narrative essay is to tell a story that involves the reader emotionally, but the medical words tend to create an impression of distance. Please consider whether you need this level of detail and where you might be able to substitute more colloquial ways of conveying what you want to express.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: The author has addressed the concerns of reviewers and editor in the following manner: 1) He has revised language in the essay which was overly medical and detracted from the story-telling aspect 2) He added a line about how his wife's experience with cancer increased his empathy for his patient 3) He added an excellent concluding sentence about how the confluence of births, deaths, and his daughter's birthday affected him. There remains a slight discrepancy, which both a reviewer and I noted, that the infant's birthday is not actually the day he was born but a year later; but the author wants to keep the language consistent for literary purposes and I'm inclined to let it slide. I recommend accept with one qualification - on the suggestion of a reviewer, the essay now includes a genogram. I don't think this is necessary. If there is space to include, fine; but it can also be omitted without great loss, and the essay is already a little over the word limit.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for these small revisions, which nevertheless I feel make the essay warmer and more accessible. I liked the lines you added both about your increased empathy for your patient as a result of your wife's own experience with cancer; and about how the journeys you've taken with your patients deepened your appreciation for your family. Thank you as well for the inclusion of the genogram. I don't know whether there will be space to include it, but I believe your fine essay stands on its own without it. This is a moving essay that shows the heart of family medicine, which will resonate deeply with our readers.