

## **FM REVIEW 2019 9 COMMENTS**

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** This is a very well-written thoughtful essay by a resident who realize that a conversation with a terminally ill patient about code status and the subsequent relationship that developed between him and the family was a crucial step in his truly becoming a doctor. Reviewer 2 makes some helpful, minor suggestions; and there are a few points to be clarified, as well as one inadvertently sexist allusion that needs to be rewritten. However, with a few adjustments, this is going to be an excellent piece for the journal.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Thank you for this poignant, well-observed and very well-written essay. The title is engaging and clever. The essay as a whole exemplifies how good storytelling should unfold - not didactically but organically, engaging the heart and the mind. We request only a few minor changes:

1) The assumption that discussing code status shouldn't be hard contradicts the earlier statement that it is a conversation most interns dread. Please clarify this point. Are you saying that, naively, based on your simulation experience, you thought it should not be hard? Maybe do a little foreshadowing to suggest that part of you suspected it had more layers than the simulation indicated.

2) I agree with reviewer 2 that it would heighten the effectiveness of the essay to introduce Mr. Duran's first name toward the end.

3) When you write that you feared Lucia facebooked you to flirt, this strikes an incongruous and inadvertently sexist note. Nothing in the essay suggests she was interested in you romantically or had the slightest interest in flirting. Please remove this allusion, and substitute something more plausible, such as she might have wanted to update you on the family etc.

4) There are a few awkward phrases or word choice pointed out in the edited version attached. Please be sure to correct these.

Your gradual epiphany in realizing that the conversation about code status was the first step in your truly becoming a physician is moving, perceptive, and humbly told. We believe it will resonate with other residents and more experienced physicians. Thank you for providing additional polish to an already excellent piece.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** The author has done a conscientious job of complying with all suggested edits and revisions. However, on rereading, a couple of additional questions occurred to me which I felt were too substantial to be addressed in copy-editing. Therefore I'm recommending one further revision, after which this essay will be ready to be accepted for publication.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II:** Thank you very much for your conscientious edits. The essay, already very well-written, tells a touching story; and changing your thoughts about Lucia's message eliminates an inadvertently inappropriate detour.

On rereading, I did find a couple of additional issues which I'd like you to address briefly:

1) Why do you note the race of the patient? It doesn't seem relevant to me (later, you establish that he is bilingual); and if it is not, then I'd suggest deleting.

2) I am a little troubled that the essay does not comment at all on your feelings/actions after you finally opened Lucia's message. How did you feel that you had waited so long to read it? Did you acknowledge her father's death in some way once you learned of his passing? I realize you want the momentum of the essay to be moving toward your gratitude for all you learned from this patient; but it seems to me that part of what you learned would be expressed in how you handled news of his death. Please think about this, and see if you can include something about that addresses this point

I also made a few stylistic edits to improve the readability of the essay.

Thank you very much for your continued work on this piece. I know we share the goal of making this story as perfect as possible.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR III:** The essay is moving in the right direction. The author addressed a major omission in the last revision, adding a page of narrative. The ideas are very good, but the writing is sloppy. The suggested changes will be easy to make and will correct these problems. I'm recommending one further revision, and expect the essay will be publishable after this round.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III:** Thank you for accepting the suggested minor revisions; and in particular for reflecting so openly and honestly on the reasons you did not open the daughter's email sooner. This is an illuminating addition to the essay. As sometimes happens with the addition of new material, the writing can still be a bit rough, even though the content is excellent. I believe all these points can be remedied very easily.

1) Please reread and revise the paragraph starting "In some ways...". Please reread and revise, possibly along these lines: "In retrospect, waiting six months showed a lack of emotional fortitude on my part and a missed opportunity... I realized that my reluctance to acknowledge her message stemmed from fear that communication outside the hospital would entail an unnecessary emotional [is this what you meant? I'm unsure what kind of risk and for whom risk] for me. If presented with the same opportunity today, I would strive to close the loop with Jack's family so that they, too, would know that they were important to me."

2) Please note the following minor corrections in the concluding paragraph: "Although I knew healing in medicine... I now better understand THAT a PHYSICIAN'S responsibility..."

3) In the sentence beginning "Upon hearing of Jack's death,..." I don't think unceremonious is quite the word you're looking for. As far as I can tell, your decision was not hasty, callous, brusque, rushed. You could simply delete this word.

4) It is a little confusing that, immediately following your insight about commitments to family and community, your promise focuses exclusively on the patient. How about revising to read: "I made a

personal promise to always treat a person and not JUST [of course, part of being a doctor IS to treat their pathology!] their pathology; and to always attend to the suffering of the family as well as that of the patient."

Thank you for your patience in continuing to work on these revisions. In a brief essay, every word matters, so let's make sure each one is exactly right.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** The author has accepted the final editorial recommendations, which a) clarified why the author did not respond to his patient's daughter's message for several months and b) enlarged his promise to treat the whole person and attend to the suffering of families as well as patients. The article is ready for publication. However, in making these corrections, the author has unwittingly incorporated a few grammatical errors. I believe it would be unfair to send the paper back to the author for yet another round. I hope Sam can correct these in the galleys:

Sam, please make the following corrections. Thank you!

- 1) Pg 5, para 2, line 22. The word should be "portrayed" (past tense)
- 2) Pg 5, para 2, line 29. There should not be a comment between "unnecessary" and "emotional."
- 3) Pg 5, para 3, line 42. The word should be "promises" (plural).

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** Thank you for working so diligently to make this essay as polished as possible. It communicates a powerful lesson about how to connect with patients and families at the end of life; that the code status conversation is about a lot more than code status; and that every death, no matter how "expected," matters. We will be glad to see it in this journal.