

FM REVIEW 2019 2 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This poem describes, from the patient's point of view, a relationship with a physician as the patient moves toward death. The author uses a rather familiar metaphor of a ship at sea beset by storms. Reviewers were quite divided about the effectiveness of this metaphor, with two expressing the opinion that it was successful, and one reviewer thinking that it lacked authenticity and did not stand on its own, as a good metaphor should. On balance, I agree with the reviewers who appreciated the metaphor; and I've given the author a few suggestions about how to strengthen it.

In terms of craft, the author tends to use passive voice, a weaker construction than active voice, and I've offered alternative phrasing. Reviewers were also confused about the changes in voice from I to we to you, and again I indicate a few ways to clarify these shifts. I recommend minor revision, in the hopes that the poem will become a bit more compelling and a bit clearer.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this poem which describes, from the patient's point of view, a relationship with a physician as the patient moves toward death. You are a good writer, and we appreciate your tackling the topic of approaching death from the patient's perspective. Overall, reviewers felt your metaphor of a ship at sea beset by storms was effective. However, one reviewer was concerned that it lacked authenticity and did not stand on its own, as a good metaphor must. Therefore, in your revision, please consider carefully any details you can add that might make this ship's voyage more credible, more real. I've made a couple of suggestions, but as I am not a nautical person, these might be off the mark. In any case, look for opportunities to continuing working within your metaphor.

There was also some confusion about the voice changes from we to I to you. In general, I thought you handled these well; but in one place it seemed as though it made more sense to speak as the patient (I) than the way it was written - doctor and patient (we). Again, please make sure these shifts are clear in the text and convey your intention.

Finally, a couple of smaller point: In general, it is better to avoid the passive voice (the favored voice of the medical chart, which obscures the presence of the narrator). The passive voice tends to be weaker, less compelling than the active voice. Please see suggested textual revisions.

Also, in my view, the poem would work better if you eliminated punctuation except when absolutely necessary to communicate the meaning; and if you used "sentence" capitalization rather than capitalizing the first word of every line (an older, more formal formatting). Please see the attached version.

We hope you will undertake a revision of this poem. The suggested rewrites are just that - suggestions - and reviewer 3 also offer some language; so please revise using the language you wish. We look forward to seeing your next version.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This medical student author has made a thoughtful effort to address reviewers' and editor's concerns. He has not always agreed with the criticisms, but I respect that. It shows he is confident in his own authorial voice. Only because it is a poem and every word matters, rather than simply accept, I've asked for a couple of small revisions. Once we are in concert about these word choices, this one will be ready to go.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for these thoughtful revisions. You have not always agreed with the reviewers/editor concerns, and I respect that. It shows you have confidence in your authorial voice. I like the way the poem has turned out. Your revisions consistently improved the piece. Voice is now more consistent with the meaning you're intending; and thank you for eliminating the passive voice, it really does make your writing more compelling.

Only because this is poetry and every word matters, I'd like you to consider two small but potentially significant further changes. One is the line "we drift from time". To me this was confusing. What about "we drift apart from time," or "away from time"? This would seem to clarify your meaning without spoiling the image.

Second, I understand Reviewer 2's point about why "care" does not exactly fit with the at-sea metaphor. The problem for me is that this word has to work on two levels: 1) It has to make sense for two people sailing together 2) it has to make sense for the patient-doctor relationship at end of life. The patient-doctor relationship is really not a friendship. So what about "I thank you for your efforts," or for "your aid". Please revisit this once more.

Finally, I'd urge you to remove the periods unless you specifically want a full stop for some literary effect (i.e., emphasis, forcing the reader to stop). One of the beauties of poetry is that it has the freedom not to follow conventional grammatical rules. Take advantage of that!

Thank you again for your careful attention in crafting this poem. It is worth it.

Comments to Editor III: This poem by a medical student uses the metaphor of a ship at sea to describe a moving relationship between patient and student. The author has effectively addressed concerns about the believability of the metaphor and has addressed confusions of voice. In the last review, I requested two small but significant changes, which the author has made. I'm pleased to say this poem is ready for publication.

Comments to Author III: Thank you for considering and then making the two small but significant changes suggested in the last round of revisions. Poems are like patients - we must attend each detail with care and respect, to get them as right as possible. There's a lot to be excavated that isn't always immediately apparent, that requires thoughtfulness and attention and curiosity. This poem reads beautifully and does an effective job of working within its nautical metaphor to represent a moving relationship between patient and (student)-doctor. Thank you for your patience with this process, and I hope you will agree the final product shows it was worth it!

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