

FM REVIEW 2019 10 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This essay confronts the naïve belief that medicine can always eliminate suffering and stave off death. Instead, the student learns that physicians eventually always come to an end of their knowledge and skill, and must help patients and family members accept the ultimate inevitability of death.

For an essay like this to be meaningful to our readers, a highly sophisticated audience, it must shed new light on how we, as medical educators, can better assist medical students in understanding the limitations of medicine and coming to terms with their own emotional responses. Unfortunately, there was not enough of the interaction between palliative medicine specialist and the student to show how this might occur. Instead, the student made her own deductions, which were insightful and growth-oriented from her perspective, but in terms of our readers, contained no truly new realizations that educators could incorporate into their work with students. Further, as with the Death and Birth essay, it would have been a better fit for our journal if the physician in question had been a family doc. Finally, the essay is not especially well-written, with several incorrect usages of words and some awkward phrasing.

I could see asking for a major revision, but ultimately I think a rewrite would take a lot of work, and might not result in a sufficiently high quality piece that would merit publication.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This essay confronts the naïve belief common among medical students that medicine can always eliminate suffering and stave off death. Instead, you learn that physicians eventually always come to an end of their knowledge and skill, and must help patients and family members accept the ultimate inevitability of death.

Despite the heartfelt nature of the essay, regretfully I feel it is not a good fit for this journal. For an essay like this to be meaningful to our readers, a highly sophisticated audience, it must shed new light on how we, as medical educators, can better assist medical students in understanding the limitations of medicine and coming to terms with their own emotional responses to these limitations. Unfortunately, there was not enough description of the interaction between you and the palliative medicine specialist to show how this might occur. Instead, you make your own deductions from the exchange, which are insightful and growth-oriented from your perspective, but in terms of our readers, do not offer enough truly new realizations that educators might incorporate into their work.

Despite this conclusion, I have great admiration for the care and attention with which you approached this difficult family conference; your acute awareness of the witnessing and empathy which the palliative medicine specialist demonstrated; and the many lessons you learned from the encounter about the courage and compassion that lie at the heart of medicine. These qualities of reflection, self- and other-awareness, and emotional intelligence will make you an outstanding physician in a few years.