

FM REVIEW 2019 17 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is an interesting essay about a resident from Nigeria who is reminded of his/her purpose in studying medicine after a trip back to his homeland. It does have potential but is in need of significant revision. Reviewer 2 makes the excellent point that prevalence of self-medication in and of itself does not seem a sufficient motivating factor, and that placing this problem within a larger context of the failings and limitations of Nigeria's healthcare system might make for a more interesting essay.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this interesting submission, which highlights the plight of many rural patients in Nigeria who, in the absence of reliable medical care, often self-diagnose and self medicate.

In order for this submission to be appropriate for the narrative essay section of the journal, it will need extensive revision. As a narrative essay, the focus of your work should be on the story you are telling (not research data and statistics). Your story has two components - 1) your encounter during a medical mission with the young man who thought he had malaria and 2) your purpose in entering medical school, propelled by the unnecessary death of your grandfather, which may have been linked in some fashion to self-medicating. These threads are where the essay should be focused.

Secondly, it was a little puzzling to reviewers and editor that the issue of self-medication would be the cause that motivated you to pursue a career in medicine. I think this is because you do not dissect root causes of self-medication, but instead take a more individual, patient education approach, which is how medicine tends to approach most problems that in fact have complex societal and structural explanations. The essay would be more compelling if you considered self-medication as a result of larger problems and shortcomings of the Nigerian healthcare system, rather than simply an individual choice.

Related to the above, a more minor point is that, as you know, in this country self-medication often refers to practices of individuals who are suppressing pain, whether psychological, physical, or both, through drugs and alcohol. It is also a very clinical-sounding term. Maybe at least vary it in your writing with a simpler phrase, such as "people who had no resources or opportunity to seek medical guidance and were forced to guess both at their illnesses and what drugs or herbs might help them."

We hope you will choose to work further on this essay, but please understand that being invited to revise your essay does not guarantee acceptance.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This is one of those essay from an author whose facility with English is not strong. As a result, the essay is clumsily written, and the story-telling is awkward. Nevertheless, it is an interesting issue (self-medication due to lack of adequate medical care and pharmacy availability) told from the perspective of someone coming from a developing nation in Africa. I've worked on the prose and the structure of the essay, so perhaps these edits will point the author in the right direction. We do not have many submissions from residents, so I hope it can be successfully revised.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for your revisions, which have improved the essay and moved it closer to the story-telling mode. You've eliminated the research references, which is to the good; and also given us a better context for understanding your concerns about self-medication.

I'm attaching a rather heavily edited copy of the essay. Most of these changes are stylistic, an effort to improve the readability and flow of your writing. You tend to rely on certain constructions ("As a...") and words ("easily," "Now") that make reading your work less fluid; and after you've revised the essay once more, you might consider asking a colleague or mentor review it for general readability.

I've also recommended that you delete the paragraph about your Hispanic patients who self-medicate. This is an interesting point, and something we see frequently in our own clinic, but you are over the word limit and in any case this seems a bit of a detour from your main story, intertwining the narrative of the young man with that of your grandfather.

I also suggest a concluding sentence to tie these narrative themes together and end on a more emotionally evocative note.

Please consider these recommendations carefully, keeping in mind that you are telling a story, so the more you can enliven your narrative, the more it will engage the readers.

Thank you very much, and we look forward to seeing another draft.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: The author has made almost all requested changes and now contributes an interesting essay about the dangers of self-medication practices in Nigeria, based on the author's memories of his grandfather and a recent patient encounter. I recommend acceptance. The last sentence still reads awkwardly, in my opinion; but I have already advised the author about revision. Perhaps this can be handled in copy-editing, per below.

Sam, the final sentence of this essay is rather involuted. Perhaps it could be changed in this minor way to make it more readable: "In all these efforts, my hope is to honor the legacy of my grandfather. I intend to use his experience and the patient encounter in West Africa as a constant reminder of why I chose to become a physician and as a motivation to continue to have greater impact on my compatriots."

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for this thorough and conscientious effort to incorporate the suggested edits. The essay reads very well and I believe will shed important light on the problems of self-medication.