

## DECISION LETTER 2014

If this is a story reflecting an actual personal experience, I am especially grateful that you would chose to share these challenges with our readership.

We feel that the topic is of real importance, and further that the story succeeds in showing the consequences of fragmented healthcare. There are several points of confusion in the piece that detract from its overall effectiveness and lead to the reader feeling befuddled rather than moved. We would like you to consider revising it taking into consideration the following points:

- 1) The shift from student at the start to doctor at the end creates confusion. Is the student part of the medical team, “explaining” the child’s chart to the narrator? Is the student making a comment about charts in general to the narrator who is a medical educator? Is the point that a student may think the chart is objective, while a more experienced clinician understands the chart with greater nuance? If so, is the statement about the doctor “knowing the facts” ironic? Can you find a way to make whatever point you want to convey less ambiguous and easier to tease out?
- 2) The phrase “a mother who came before me” also seems unnecessarily ambiguous. Could you just use the phrase “birth mother” - unless this is not whom you are referring to?
- 3) The shift from “I” to “we” also seems gratuitously confusing. Further, the “we” is ambiguous – is it the narrator and a partner? How did the story move from “I” to “we”?
- 4) The sentence starting with “How” is hard to understand – after several rereadings I realized it is a fragment describing the way in which the new parents work with a doctor who knows “the facts” to untangle their child’s medical history. But it took me awhile to realize that the phrase just ends. Is there a way of rewording this?
- 5) The final line about “it matters...” is quite lovely and touching. But again, it seems not completely connected to what has gone before: does it refer to the student’s perception vs. the doctor’s perception? The earlier mother vs. the narrator? Maybe all of these?
- 6) A small point, but the requirements of a 55 word story entail that the essay itself is precisely 55 words, exclusive of the title. The title does not count toward the 55 word total.

On balance, this 55 word story tackles an important issue about what we know and don’t know about medical histories in cases of adoption and foster parenting. It evoked a range of responses in reviewers, but all agreed there is something of great value here that deserves developing. We hope you will be willing to rework this submission in order to illuminate its essential message with greater clarity.

DECISION LETTER II: Based on my review and on reviewer comments I am not able to accept your submission. However, it is a much, much improved piece. Thank you so much for all the obvious work you've put into the revisions. The title is wonderful, much better than the original "Fact-Finding." All the distracting ambiguities have vanished. The piece now has an enviable coherence and focus organized around the importance of story. The present tense makes these 55 words compelling, and the reader is quickly drawn in.

**DECISION LETTER III: I am pleased to inform you that your work has now been accepted for publication in *Families, Systems, and Health*. Thank you for the minor change in wording which, though small, was significant. Your sensitivity regarding "mother against mother" was also well-taken, and the change to "parent" successfully avoids that pitfall.**

**I have one small suggestion. The phrase "thank goodness" seems trite. Mindful of the 55 word constraint, what about instead "I'm grateful" or other words of your own choosing that bring the narrator back into the telling with more immediacy. Otherwise, you have addressed all reviewer concerns in a very satisfying manner.**