Family Medicine Moments

September 14, 2023

Introduction: Welcome - and Welcome back to Family Medicine Moments. During this academic year you will receive a medical humanities piece each week on Thursday morning (unless it is a vacation week). These pieces are created by YOU! This is your forum.

I created this listserv format over a decade ago so that we could celebrate the work and teaching we do at UMass Chan. I invite students, residents, faculty, staff to share your musings, essays, stories, poems, haiku, 55 and 6-word stories, music, photos, artwork, or something completely different. I ask that you remove any personal health information (PHI). Thanks for reading. Thanks for sharing.

And now for week 1. This piece comes from a medical student who just arrived at UMass Chan! Prem Patel, Class of ‘27 shares with us a copy of the writing assignment for the White Coat Ceremony.

Prem reflects on what the white coat represents and what it does not. I am reminded of an essay on the topic of "can medical students be taught compassion?". The white coat is a cloak that covers over the person who brings humanity to medical school in the first place. Let's all help Prem and the Class of ‘27 hang onto and foster that humanity. And be reminded of our own commitment to our helping profession as we see it through the eyes of a new member of our team.
White Coat Ceremony

By Prem Patel

Although it feels as if our journey has just begun, it seems apt that we have a ceremony to celebrate receiving our white coats. Ceremonies represent transformations.

We have funeral ceremonies that represent the transformation of life to death. We have marriage ceremonies that represent the transformations of two single people into a married couple. We have birthday ceremonies to represent the passage of time and signal our annual personal transformations. However, this does not mean that the day we receive our white coats is the day we are transformed – rather, it is the day that our transformation begins.

As we step onto the stage, receive our white coats and step into a new role and a new beginning, it is a chance to look around and acknowledge the people who lead us to this moment. Let us not forget that the white coat must always be worn as an additional layer on top of what we are already wearing. This is a reminder that we must hold onto who we are as people outside of medicine as it is the very foundation for our white coats and careers as physicians. To the observer, it may seem like the most monumental moment of a future physician’s life is receiving the white coat. For me, now on the inside, I am coming to recognize that the greatest achievement will not be receiving my white coat but using it, and more importantly deserving it while working in the service of my future patients.

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