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The Patients

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Family Medicine Moments

April 18, 2024

Introduction: I am grateful to my mentee Suhasini Gupta, UMass Chan MS '25, who agreed to have me share her recent reflection from a session we do annually with 3rd years. The prompt asks students to reflect at the end of their clerkships on a time when they felt they were valued or added value; as part of the exercise, they are asked to re-read their medical school application essay (we send it to them) and review last year's Class Oath to help them also comment on how medical school experiences are shaping their values. Suhasini plans to go into orthopedics. Clearly the values she exemplifies in this essay will make her a very special orthopedist indeed. And her reflection was a reminder for me to revisit again - *why did I go into this wonderful profession?* Oh yes - the patients!

"the patients"

By Suhasini Gupta

The third year of medical school has been an interesting experience, with a lot of highs and lows, and memories of times with patients that will be foundational in both my growth as a person and as a future physician. On the last day of my third-year clerkships, one of my co-med students on the service asked what my favorite part of the third year had been. I remember feeling both our surprise when I didn't list any of the unique procedures I had seen, or career discovery moments, but instead, I could reply without any hesitations, "the patients."

There were times I cried for a patient, or with a patient, or even because of what someone might have said to me. But for all of those times, there were times I laughed, shared the patient's joys and hopes, and was able to leave the room feeling *valued*. I have a distinct memory of being sent downstairs to the ER on my 5th rotation, early in the morning, to go see a patient. Having had a late night studying before this, I remember feeling exhausted and not very excited about having this early morning consult. As I was making my way down the several flights of stairs, and quickly trying to review their chart on Haiku, I remember being struck with a realization. Despite how exhaustive or even repetitive this exercise felt to me, for this patient this was the day they had come into the ER. This was probably one of the worst days they would recall for years to come, and I was the first face from this new team whom they would meet that morning. With that realization, I tried to change my outlook and walked to their room with more intention. And what followed was a wonderful interaction, where I worked with that patient for several days while she was on our service. I not only presented her case several times to my attendings and residents, wrote all her notes, called all her consults, and helped with her discharge paperwork and follow-up, but more importantly, I also had the privilege of spending an incredible amount of time talking to her and her family that would come to visit, comforting her on days she seemed disheartened and advocating for her needs and desires to my team.

I can say with assurance, that with nearly every patient that I was able to spend time with this year, regardless of the specialty, and regardless of the setting ranging from clinic to inpatient, it is the *time* that I have been able to spend with them, and the interactions that I have had that made me feel *valued*. I have experienced that there is so much joy in being a source of comfort and confidence in helping someone navigate difficult days of their life. Above all, I have learned how much despite the countless things I have not enjoyed about the nature of medicine this year, it is this very powerful source of *value* that I have found in caring for patients, that has provided me so much purpose and joy.

As I was re-reading my medical school admission essay, I was thinking about how I interacted with an elderly woman in a South Indian village while I was working in medical clinics. I remembered how disheartened I had felt when I wasn't able to feel like I helped her, because she needed someone to talk to, and I couldn't because of our language barrier. But seeing her relief in talking to my team-mate who could speak her language, I also saw the power of human connection, which I experienced on an everyday basis in this past year of clerkships.

As I move forward, and look toward the rest of my career, I hope despite how busy I get in my future days of training, or how difficult some of the weeks can and will be, I can spend a few minutes recognizing the privilege that I have in being able to interact with my patients, on significant days of their life. I hope I can take a few minutes in every interaction and remember why I chose this profession, and the honor of providing care. As I re-read the class oath that we said on the day of our white coat ceremony, the part that seems the most impactful now is the starting few lines, "May I always hold close the original inspirations that brought me to this profession. For it is a gift to care for, support, and be present with my patients along their life journey."