Reflection #1

There have been many interactions during my medical training that affected not only my outlook on my future career, but also my view on the medical profession as a whole. The University of Florida provides students with countless opportunities to interact with patients and learn from our experiences with these individuals. During my third year, however, when I started directly caring for patients in both the inpatient and outpatient setting, I was surprised by the frequent pieces of advice, words of encouragement and lessons patients shared with me. One particularly memorable encounter was with a patient I met on my internal medicine rotation, but this advice didn’t come from the patient, but rather from a devoted family member.

The patient was a 92 year old gentleman who had been in and out of the hospital over the last several months for severe anemia, which contributed to gastrointestinal bleeding. He returned to the emergency room yet again after his daughter and caretakers noted more blood in his stool earlier that day. Speaking with him in the emergency room it became clear that because of the severity of his dementia, he was unable to relay any specific details concerning his health and medical history. His daughter, however, who arrived shortly after I did, was not only calm, despite the severity of her father’s medical condition, but knew every detail of his history and care needs. Looking at her interactions with her ailing father, I was clearly able to see how much she loved him and wanted what was in his best interest.

I spent most of my afternoon with them, running back and forth between the resident’s room and the coronary care unit relaying information pertaining to blood transfusions and status updates. His daughter was so active in his care the entire time that she refused to leave the bedside. Because of his deteriorating medical condition, it was clear that his prognosis was grim and we began to talk about hospice and palliative care. I was apprehensive about how his daughter would react as we approached this discussion later that morning after rounds. I had volunteered with hospice for four years throughout my undergraduate degree and knew the benefits the service could provide for both my patient and his faithful daughter.

While pre-rounding, I entered the room to find him peacefully sleeping with his daughter holding his hand in the chair beside him. She asked to speak with me outside of the room, where she asked the most terrifying question of third year, “So what is the plan going to be for today?” It was at this moment that I realized that she had placed her trust in me, as well as the remaining members of the team, to do what was best for her father. She, the caretaker of her father, knew she could no longer care for her beloved father alone.

I sat with the patient’s daughter for 30 minutes or so, discussing the options we had for the near future in regards to her father’s care. We then chatted about her time with her father, and the things she would miss the most when he was gone. Almost late for rounds, I had to quickly leave her at the nursing station but promised to return later to finish our conversation. That afternoon, after a lecture, I did return finding him comfortable and his daughter faithfully
remaining by his side. After I had provided her with information regarding local hospice facilities, she stopped me at the door to her father’s room and said something I will never forget: “Never lose the human-side of yourself, the side that makes you stop and talk to patients and their family members. The side of you that genuinely cares about another human being no matter how busy you are. That is the part of you that will make you a great doctor.”

I have had very similar experiences since but this episode had an impact like no other experience thus far in my medical career. We all know that we should stop and listen to our patients and find out about their lives, not just their medical needs. However, not many of us realize that stopping to talk to our patients and their families is so much more than that. It is an opportunity to be humbled at the site of a human being truly caring for and loving another. Both of those instances are something rare and beautiful that I almost forgot existed during the hustle and bustle of medical school, where grades and portfolios are always on the edge of my mind. Mr. W’s daughter reminded me that medicine is not simply making a diagnosis and formulating an assessment and plan. Medicine is the act of human beings truly caring for and loving one another. Regardless of their backgrounds, our patients will remind us of this, if we take the time to pay attention.
Reflection #2

Be Still

In the midst of the sirens, helicopter rotor blades, beeps, coughs and cries, be still
In the midst of never ending demands, exhaustion and sleep deprivation, be still
In the midst of complications and drug interactions, be still
In the midst of criticism and self-doubt, be still
In the midst of greed and injustice, be still

Open your tired and weary eyes to life unfolding, now
In the chaos, recognize the beauty of birth, passing and the in-between

Make time for contemplation
For much needed rejuvenation

Stay grounded
To your roots remain connected
Bend without breaking
Grow with your arms always extending
Towards the clear sky and sun shining

If you don’t stop and pause
Stay still and breathe
You will miss the wonder of being
Become immune to joy, human sorrow and suffering

The miracle of life will become mundane
And death an ordinary thing
The unfolding of a first life, you will simply call G1P1001
And the worst moment of a woman’s life, SAB
A kiss by death a code
A lifetime of torment chronic
You will utter these words without feeling
Numb to joy and suffering

Time will pass too quickly
Illuminating what you didn’t want to see
Take away your empathy
As hard as a rock, your heart will be

Humility will be replaced by pride
Selfishness will take over
Push altruism to the side

Like them, you will put first the bottom line
Turn a blind eye to profits a mile high

One morning you will look in the mirror and see someone else, not you
You won’t recognize the person that you have turned into
You will begin to sob
Wondering when your life’s calling turned into a job
A privilege into a burden
Wonder what caused your heart to harden
What happened to your stillness, your inner heaven?

Only then will you realize how much you have sacrificed
How much you’ve lost and compromised

That gloomy night, you run to the other side of the tunnel
Searching for the light you have been after all your life
Only to find bitterness in the dark