Lessons From Our Learners

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Feature Editor

Editor’s Note: Submissions to this column may be in the form of papers, essays, poetry, or other similar forms. Editorial assistance will be provided to develop early concepts or drafts. If you have a potential submission or idea, or if you would like reactions to a document in progress, contact the series editor directly: William D. Grant, EdD, SUNY Upstate Medical University, Department of Family Medicine, 475 Irving Avenue, Suite 200, Syracuse, NY 13210. 315-464-6997. Fax: 315-464-6982. grantw@upstate.edu.

“Interacts Well With Patients”

Anne D. Walling, MD

The standardized patient program (SPP) was not his favorite way to learn. An intelligent and outgoing young man with good social and clinical skills, he found the standardized patient situations artificial and awkward. The tutorials during which we analyzed and “deconstructed” the cases mainly helped him by validating much of what he already did well. We always got the impression that he would rather be in the midst of a busy clinic than in the SPP Lab. Nevertheless, he diligently attended to the course requirements and feedback from standardized patients and faculty members.

Today, he was doing well in a challenging scenario situation. The task involved a patient in the recovery room after exploratory surgery. He was down at eye level, gently stroking her hand as he assured her that the surgery had gone well, the findings were benign, and she had shown every sign of handling the physical stress of the operation well. His voice was clear, well modulated, and calm, conveying both empathy and professional confidence. He used a few open-ended questions to explore her symptoms and fears but appropriately focused on specific questions targeting key symptoms to establish her needs. His assessment and plan were professional, efficient, and complete—exactly as required. With the business attended to, he suddenly grinned and said “Dr W, you really didn’t think you could sneak in here for surgery without one of us wanting to look after you?”

As she slipped back into unconsciousness, the patient was glad to recall the very good final grade in clinical skills and enthusiastic letter of recommendation for residency that she had written last year for this young man, including her comment, “Interacts well with patients.” Yes he does. Sometimes, being a teacher pays off.

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