

## Lessons From Our Learners

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**William D. Grant, EdD**

Feature Editor

**Jo Marie Reilly, MD**

Associate 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 Ave., Suite 200, Syracuse, NY 13210. 315-464-4365. Fax: 315-464-6982. grantw@upstate.edu.

## When Does This Feeling Go Away?

**Valerie Ross, MS**

Every year during the darkest, dreariest time of year in the Pacific Northwest, our residency has a retreat for the interns. The winter tends to be a difficult time in the intern year in general. Our residency is based in a major academic center, and due to the structure of our rotations, first-year residents do not see each other, or the faculty, on a regular basis. The faculty typically structure the day to help interns connect with faculty and reconnect with each other and themselves.

This year, however, the third-year residents took over and planned the afternoon activities, requesting that only a few of the faculty attend. All 3 years of residents were invited. They were given two pieces of paper and asked to write down an experience that epitomized the worst of residency on one piece of paper. These experiences could refer to their work or personal life. On the other piece of paper, resi-

dents wrote of an experience that represented the way they hoped things could be more often. They were asked to note their year of training to demonstrate that all residents had challenging and positive experiences.

The papers were placed in a hat. The hat was passed around the room, and each resident pulled out a piece of paper and read what was on the page. Then the facilitating resident waited for responses. The empathy, support, and mentoring that emerged from the process on the part of all residents was moving to witness.

As they spoke, I wrote down their words to represent their dialogue using a poetic form called "found poetry." On behalf of the current family medicine residents of the University of Washington:

"When does this feeling go away?"

He asks me for narcotics every time,  
He's a scary guy.  
He said he took a glass,  
named it after me,

and threw it and broke it.

At what point in our training did we learn about that?

Something frightening happens and you forget what to do.

I should have . . .

If I caught it sooner . . .

Should I go out on a limb . . . ?

Alone

Terrified

I'm not going to know what to do.

When I can't help them

It's not as enjoyable.

Fibromyalgia,

Back pain,

a circumcision gone wrong.

The patient was depressed all winter,

I was depressed all winter,

It sucks sometimes.

Part of the sanity is having someone to share it with.

Over time,

You can appreciate the difficult.

Over time,

They aren't that bad.

Problem kids are sometimes the funniest.

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From the Family Medicine Residency, University of Washington.

You know,  
 the ones you tell stories about when  
 you go home.  
 It's like that.  
 Once you put behind in your mind  
 that lump of fear,  
 The patients start to grow on you.

I loved seeing the babies,  
 and then the old people.  
 I finally knew something  
 no one else knew.  
 It was just their stories, but . . .

OB, delivering babies and no tears  
 to repair  
 My son tells everyone at school:  
 "My mom's a doctor, she delivers  
 babies."

When does this feeling go away?  
 You know,  
 that feeling of "where is the se-  
 nior?"  
 There is a trust-in-the-process  
 thing,  
 You don't always know the good  
 things you are doing.

The secret  
 Is being Okay with not knowing.  
 You don't always know  
 the good things you are doing.

*Acknowledgement:* This is submitted on behalf of the residents of the University of Washington Family Medicine Residency. With their review and permission, the interpretation is mine, the words are theirs.

*Correspondence:* Address correspondence to Ms Ross, University of Washington, Family Medicine Residency, Box 354775, Seattle, WA 98105. 206-598-7488. vross@fammed.washington.edu.