

Lessons From Our Learners

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A Teacher of Teachers

Anthony Zamudio, PhD

“Do you think this means giving physicians therapy?” I asked my friend about an open family medicine residency behavioral science position. “No,” she answered somewhat uncertainly, “I think you teach residents how to provide the therapy.” I was intrigued so I applied.

At my first interview, I came face to face with Patrick W. Pennock, MD—my stereotype of a physician. He stood tall, wore glasses, was bearded, with powerful eyes, and spoke in a deep voice without an inkling of self-doubt in his tone and mannerisms. He showed me into his office, clearly leading the way to a comfortably lighted room with a photo of the Dali Lama hanging on a wall facing me. He began the interview asking what I knew about family medicine. While I wasn't informed on the specifics of the family medicine curriculum,

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From the Family Medicine Residency, University of Southern California Hospital.

my own personal physician was a family physician so I basically described Dr Fernandez's approach. “Family physicians care about everything. Besides the medicine, they're also concerned about their patient's personal life, and they teach about health and prevention.” Fortunately, I also had a wealth of grass roots community psychology experience so I could answer his numerous questions about the inner-city challenges with immigrants and the underserved and how I would teach residents doing home visits. He hired me, and I accepted not only a behavioral science director position but also an unofficial fellowship in teaching.

He taught me how to teach, administrate meetings, and inspired me to write. He was a masterful lecturer. He drew his residents into his presentations, asking questions that stimulated their curiosity and challenged their decision-making process as they reviewed a patient's symptoms, history, assessment, and treatment plans. The room would come alive even for the post-call first-year interns. Administratively,

he was the definition of efficiency. He kept his faculty focused on the agenda especially when heated debates erupted. He'd type his own minutes within an hour after a meeting and have them distributed for his faculty's approval with their assignments noted. He wrote his grants single-handedly, gathering members of the program to brainstorm and then produce a finished product in the first draft. He wasn't always popular given he ran a tight ship, but he was revered given his productivity.

Suddenly and very unexpectedly after my fifth year and his 10th year in the program, he announced his resignation. Tears and requests from residents for him to recant his resignation never made him reconsider his decision for a second. Privately, he told me he was burned out and needed a change. Within 2 years of his departure, he relocated. We kept in touch through holiday cards and an annual phone call at the end of the year. While he acted disinterested about the residency, he was still curious and he couldn't help but ask me for more details when

I'd mention the Match or department changes. He'd always respond at the end with, "How can you still be there? What's wrong with you, are you a crazy psychologist?" I'd always reply, "You should know, you hired me," and he'd laugh. He was clearly content; he worked in a clinic in an underserved area and enjoyed the arts and vacations with his partner.

My cell phone rang, It was his caller ID. "What a pleasant surprise," I said. But it wasn't him, it was his partner. He'd passed in his sleep. He hadn't been ill, but

his blood pressure had been high. I couldn't help myself. There must be a way of undoing the truth. But just like when he announced his resignation, there wasn't.

His death feels premature. Perhaps more attention to his own health could have provided him with more time. On the other hand, he may have simply had a shorter path than we all expected.

I continue to aspire to achieve the same level of enthusiasm he received from his residents, his clarity when he spoke and wrote, and his strength in expressing his

ideas and beliefs. He helped me to find my niche and feel that I have an important purpose in imparting an important proverb to a profession that can sometimes become selfless: Physician, heal thyself.

Sleep tight, my friend. You have well earned your rest.

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