We are such stuff as dreams are made on—William Shakespeare
(The Tempest, Act IV, scene I.)

In Family Medicine Needs a Generation of Dreamers, Scherger says, “The biggest challenge facing family medicine today is to develop a new generation of dreamers” to transform the specialty to meet the challenges of the information age and globalization. As family medicine educators, it is our responsibility to help create this new generation. One way to stimulate our residents to become a “generation of dreamers” is by utilizing media to present a biopsychosocial/spiritual approach to exploring the phenomenon of dreaming. To prepare residents for this presentation, they are asked to think about the following questions in advance:

Did you have a childhood dream that you were motivated to pursue? If so, what was it? Has it been fulfilled? If not, why not?

We begin the presentation by looking at dreams from the historical and spiritual perspective, highlighting the fact that for centuries people have considered dreams to be prophetic messages from their gods. For example, ancient Greeks slept in temples dedicated to the god of medicine, Asclepius, to receive dreams that would cure them. Dreams also play a prominent role throughout the Bible. One of the most famous Biblical dreamers is Joseph. His ability to interpret dreams angered his brothers but ultimately helped him find favor with Pharaoh and save both Egypt and the Israelites from a devastating famine. Joseph’s ability to predict the future by interpreting dreams is illustrated by showing a video of the song “Joseph’s Dreams” from Andrew Lloyd Weber’s Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (2000) starring Donnie Osmond. After the video, residents are asked if they have ever had a dream suggesting a particular fate and, if so, how they reacted to it.

A modern-day story of a supernatural revelation captured people’s imagination with the phrase, “Build it, and he will come,” from the 1989 movie “Field of Dreams.” In the video clip shown to the residents, Ray Kinsella, an Iowa corn farmer, sees a vision of a baseball diamond in the middle of his corn field while hearing a voice say, “If you build it, he will come.” Compelled by his vision, Ray uproots his corn and risks financial ruin to build his field of dreams. With unwavering commitment to the dream, Ray and his family discover the field’s magical powers to bring back famous baseball players of the past and to help bring peace to painful family memories. A number of residents felt as compelled by their dreams to become a doctor as Ray...
Kinsella was to build his field. They described their early childhood memories of playing doctor and always wanting to be around people and help them. Some even went so far as to immigrate to the United States to pursue their medical education.

The historical/spiritual portion of the presentation ends with a picture of a Native American dreamcatcher. According to Native American legends, dreams are messages from sacred spirits. The dreamcatcher allows good dreams to slip through its web and into the sleeper while bad dreams are caught in the web and destroyed by the morning light. Traditionally, dreamcatchers are hung over the cradle of newborns to protect them while they sleep.

As part of the presentation, residents are given their own dreamcatcher to help protect them and their families.

Two alternative ways of understanding dreams are from psychological and biological perspectives. In his landmark book, The Interpretation of Dreams, Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of the ego and described his theory of dreams as an attempt by the unconscious to resolve remote or recent conflicts. Freud believed that dreams were the “royal road to the unconscious.” In recent times, scientists have shifted from Freud’s psychological understanding of dreams to exploring the biology of dreaming and sleeping.

Residents tend to be familiar with both of these perspectives from college and medical school, so they are discussed only briefly as a transition to exploring the potential social impact of dreams.

Dreams have inspired people to social action for generations. This inspirational power of dreams is beautifully portrayed in the 1965 musical Man of La Mancha. The musical is based on the life of Miguel De Cervantes and his novel, Don Quixote De La Mancha. It tells the classic story of Don Quixote as a play within a play. The musical’s song “The Impossible Dream (The Quest)” is played for the residents. In it, Don Quixote explains why he chases windmills and pursues seemingly impossible dreams:

To dream the impossible dream, To fight the unbeatable foe…
This is my quest, to follow that star,
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far…
And the world will be better for this,
That one man, scorned and covered with scars,
Still strove with his last ounce of courage,
To reach the unreachable stars!

One resident shared his impossible childhood dream of becoming “a big red fire truck.” When he realized that that would never come true, he turned to another childhood dream: “My father and I watched episodes of M*A*S*H, and I was always enamored with the humor and compassion these physicians portrayed. I wanted to help people, in a way that could touch them, like the doctors on M*A*S*H.”

Another third-year resident shared that fulfilling her dream of becoming a family physician has made her realize “that being a family physician does not only entail medical knowledge but also giving of yourself in ways that I never thought possible.”

Next, the residents are shown video clips about two historical figures whose dreams have transformed their countries. The first is Mahatma Gandhi. Two scenes from the 1982 film Gandhi,” starring Ben Kingsley, are shown. The first clip shows Gandhi meeting with India’s British rulers to tell them it is time for them to leave “because 100,000 Englishman simply cannot control 350 million Indians if those Indians refuse to cooperate, and that is what we intend to achieve—peaceful, nonviolent, noncooperation until you yourself see the wisdom of leaving.”

The second clip shows Gandhi explaining the power of civil resistance to a reporter at the beginning of the Salt March to Dandi: “The function of a civil resistance is to provoke response, and we will continue to provoke until they respond or they change the law. They are not in control, we are, that is the strength of civil resistance.” Since a number of our residents are from India, they have the opportunity to share their personal insights about Gandhi and his impact on India.

The second person we discuss, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, applied Gandhi’s theories on nonviolence and civil disobedience to the fight against racial discrimination in the United States. Dr King became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership in the Civil Rights movement. On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 Americans gathered at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to hear Dr King deliver his “I Have a Dream” speech. The portion of his speech that we show the residents includes the following: “I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream . . . I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.”

Hearing this speech stimulates the residents to discuss the power of Dr King’s dream and the ongoing struggle to make it a reality.

Mahatma Gandhi and Dr King are real-life examples of people questing for an “Impossible Dream.” Their example, along with this biopsychosocial/spiritual exploration of dreams, can help inspire our residents to become the next generation of family physician dreamers. As our residents are about to fulfill their personal dreams of becoming family physicians, we should challenge them to use their hard-earned knowledge and skills to start new dreams for
the benefit of society. Whether it be to care for an underserved population, advocate for a more-equitable health care system, or help redesign family medicine for the 21st century, we should encourage our residents to strive for a dream that reaches “for the unreachable stars,” so that the world “will be better” for them having become family physicians.

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