

Putting Humanity Back in Medicine

By: Taxiaria J Arabatzis

Over the past four years I have spent much time reflecting on how we treat others.

How we treat our classmates, how we treat patients, how we treat residents and attendings, and how we treat our school staff and administration. I have also spent much time reflecting on how others have treated us, how we are treated by our classmates, by our patients, by residents, by attendings, by nurses, by housekeeping, by teachers, and by administrators alike.

I am a firm believer that the best way to treat others is to treat them how you want to be treated. I am also a firm believer that all human beings at some point in their life will become a patient, and therefore deserve the utmost respect that all patients do. But why wait until someone is a patient to give them that respect?

It is unfortunately inevitable in the current culture of medicine and medical training that trainees are treated poorly. I have repeated to myself many times that the only thing separating my attending and me is sheer time. I cannot “grow up” overnight into an attending: the process takes time and patience. This is seen most clearly when students are genuinely amazed and overwhelmingly thankful when someone treats them with respect. And although I have had many attendings, instructors, peers, and others who have treated me with respect and truly been interested in my learning, it is a shame to the medical community that when that does happen I am shocked, as if it is an anomaly to be kind and caring. I often expect to be looked down upon, questioned, blamed, or simply ignored.

It is not lost on me that the very profession that requires we be all forgiving, kind, and endlessly compassionate to our patients is the same profession that has little room for mistakes, forgiveness, kindness, or compassion to one another or its trainees.

But there is much room for hope. The culture is changing. There is room to be vulnerable. Instead of hiding away the dark side of medicine that we all experience, there is healing in sharing our experiences and showing grace to one another.

To train compassionate, caring, and kind doctors, we need to start from within and treat our trainees and each other with kindness and compassion. When we finally learn to treat others the way we wish to be treated, we will have healthier, happier lives and so will our patients, who will benefit immensely. My question is difficult: How do we put humanity back in medicine? But the answer is simple: we treat each other as human beings, and the way we would want to be treated.