

Capstone for Impact Submission | GY2021

**Project Title:** *Humanities and the Healing Arts: Sharing the Human Experience*

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**Advisor Names(s):** Dr. Nancy Barbas

**Summary (~250-500 words):**

My capstone project is a collection of poetry that encapsulates the human experience on the wards and in the clinical spaces. The aim was to reflect on the human experience in medicine by portraying the perspective of patients, their family members, and healthcare providers as illness affects their lives. As I completed my capstone over the course of several months, there were valuable lessons I learned regarding the role of poetry in wellness, developing empathy, and improving observational capacity, all of which make one a more astute and wholesome physician.

Regarding wellness, reserving time to write down images or moments of emotional intensity enabled me to reflect later. It was a key strategy in shifting focus from personal struggle to patient needs and the intricacies of medicine that first drew me to the profession. This practice increased my ability to manage the challenges of medical school with more fortitude by reminding me that I am pursuing a career in medicine to be in a profession where both compassion and curiosity intersect.

Writing poetry also amplified my ability to empathize with others because it heightened my awareness of the human experience. Being a poet means honing observational capacity. To write well you must be aware of setting, emotions, and senses to create something original. This increased awareness draws more attention to the patient, which improves the doctor-patient relationship.

Observational capacity helped me think more critically as a rising doctor by merging my identities as a sensor and thinker. As a student-doctor there is a continuous effort to find the right answer and craft assessments and plans. But in relying on illness scripts, one risks forgetting to individualize the patient and hence may fail to deliver care while managing disease. As a rising doctor, I think by systems. But merging my identities as a physician-poet helps me identify both role patterns of illness and of a person, which has given me an all-encompassing approach to patient care.

Overall, poetry is a useful tool for any physician in practicing wellness, empathy, and capacity to intake sensory information.

**Methodology:**

To enhance my writing, I shared my pieces with other writers for input, read more poetry, and utilized books meant to help poets improve their craft. I had a total of four one-hour sessions with writers who reviewed original pieces, during which they provided feedback. I also capitalized on time spent in the healthcare setting to reflect on the human experience when I connected with patients by directly providing care, or indirectly as a student reviewing their pathology in a research facility. Once a poem was ready, I submitted to journals and the University of Michigan DEI Summit 2020 for publication.

**Results:**

By the conclusion of my CFI project, I compiled a chapbook with a collection of 16 poems in various styles and 16 haiku. Several poems were published, including in The Pharos and the LMSA Journal. My work was also featured in the 2020 University of Michigan DEI Summit alongside other artists and writers who aim to build an anti-racist world through art.

**Conclusion (~250-500 words):**

As providers, it is easy to deprioritize personal connection that promotes delivery of care when we are focused on following standards of care and meeting deadlines. The ongoing need to advance overshadows what a physician’s main focus should be: caring for the patient. As someone who started medical school with an artistic lens, I have a desire to dissect for detail while also maintaining view of the bigger picture. When there is endless information that one must absorb for the next steps in their training, focusing on tangible moments, images, smells, and even tastes, amplifies our situational awareness and keeps us grounded. As an intuitive thinker who analyzes problems, I spend much time in my own mind to create solutions; but the awareness of setting and sensory information has empowered me to connect with others in the midst of problem-solving, both of which are key to practicing medicine. Writing is thus merging the sensing and the thinking functions in an effort to reflect and seek the right answers.

This form of reflection is complementary to current teachings which encourage empathy for the patient and wellness for those in the medical profession. These are the lessons I learned as I compiled a collection of poetry. In the midst of challenges I faced in medical school and the need to mark off endless to dos and deadlines, I was able to validate my emotions and recall my motivations for being a physician in the first place, which was be in a field where compassion and curiosity intersect. Creative writing is hence a powerful tool for the physician to become a more empathetic and wholesome practitioner.

**Reflection/Impact Statement:**

Writing poetry was a labor of love as I completed rotations. I say so because it developed my eye for detail, ability to connect with others, and encouraged my own wellness by promoting thoughtful meditation and stimulation from common tasks. Developing a poetic lens helped me appreciate intricacies of treatment, disease, pathophysiology, and poignant moments in patient care. I have submitted a final piece, but my work is not done. More poetry and narratives are being drafted, and more will come as I employ writing as a wellness tool throughout training. My advice to other students is to focus on what they are passionate about to find their niche in medicine. It is in this way that one makes contributions to the field that not only engenders accomplishment, but joy in their work.