

Spring 2023

A Physician's Most Important Teachers

Rachel Pray

student, rp1595@mynsu.nova.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/bestill>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), [Critical Care Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Health Communication Commons](#), and the [Medical Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pray, Rachel (2023) "A Physician's Most Important Teachers," *be Still*: Vol. 7, Article 13.

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/bestill/vol7/iss1/13>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Osteopathic Medicine at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in be Still by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

A Physician's Most Important Teachers

Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to the patients, family members, friends, physicians, professors, and healthcare professionals that have taught me invaluable lessons on my journey to becoming a physician. The importance of each of you cannot be overstated.

I hope to never lose sight of the reasons why I became a physician: to make deep, real connections with patients while they may be going through one of the worst or most uncertain time of their lives - offering comfort and expertise to ease their worries - and to assist them in becoming the best, healthiest, happiest versions of themselves. Remembering my "why" has helped me overcome the struggles and trials of medical school, and I will continue to hold it close to me throughout my medical career.

AUTHOR: RACHEL PRAY

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines of varying lengths, slanted diagonally from the bottom right towards the top right, set against a blue background.

A PHYSICIAN'S MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS

I was not prepared for the things I saw and heard as a third-year medical student completing a rotation in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The cries of family members as they faced the reality of never speaking to their loved one again. Seeing patients with multiple tubes in place, incapacitated, breathing with the assistance of a machine, and in their most vulnerable state. Muffled conversations of sons and daughters discussing what their loved one would have wanted to happen to them, while they grappled with the trauma, shock, and pain of the current situation. There was so much death, heartbreak, uncertainty, and sadness in that ICU, and I acknowledge that. However, I would like to focus on the positive lessons and experiences from my ICU rotation that I will carry with me in my career as a future physician and that have touched my soul as a human.

I watched a daughter show up everyday for more days than I can count to support her father during his time in the ICU. She was always by his side, present at rounds and waiting to be updated on developments in his care. She always had a smile on her face. I can't imagine how difficult it was to see her father in such a vulnerable state and make decisions about his health, while still juggling the difficulties of her own life. She was at his bedside everyday. From her, I learned patience, loyalty, and the importance of being there.

I watched a family make the extremely difficult decision to transition their loved one to hospice care. While they did not want their loved one to die or be gone, they also did not want them to suffer. They realized honoring their loved one's wishes was more important than the desire to keep them breathing. They faced an immediate tsunami of emotions after making the decision, but they had given their family member their last remaining shred of autonomy, after so much of it had already been stripped from them. From this, I learned what honor, respect, and love look like.

I watched a patient who had once been kept alive by multiple machines and medications, restricted to only the hospital bed for weeks, slowly improve. One day, she finally took her first steps with a physical therapist. Her goal was to go from the bed to the hallway. She struggled with each step but persisted on. Her strength and resilience lifted up the entire unit. She smiled with triumph, happiness, and pride. From her, I learned tenacity and to never give up.

I watched a family member, clearly emotionally drained from their experience thus far in the ICU, graciously thank the team on rounds. They were so grateful for the updates from the team, care their family member had received thus far, and effort that everyone was putting towards helping their loved one. She was in a living nightmare, dealing with grueling decisions and the terrible reality of the situation, but she still took the time to emphasize her appreciation. From her, I learned what genuine gratitude looks like. I also learned the power of taking the extra time to make family members feel truly heard and understood.

I have learned that these are the things that patients value most: having a physician that listens, respects them, offers comfort and expertise, and puts forth their best effort. Making a patient feel comfortable and at ease is just as important as prescribing the proper medication. The medicine is complicated, but being there for patients is simple. In addition, there is so much more to learn from patients than just the management of a rare disease and how to diagnose and treat illnesses.

Patients offer such candor, valuable advice and experiences. The strength and resilience they exhibit when facing difficult health predicaments is admirable and reminds me to apply these same principles to my own life. I am humbled and honored by the trust they have placed in physicians, and even I, as I have gone through clinical rotations. I have gained an exorbitant amount of knowledge during my three years of medical school, and I am eternally grateful for the professors, physicians, and staff that have contributed to my medical education. However, the most important lessons I have learned were in the hospital and clinic from patients and their loved ones.

Rachel Pray is currently a third-year medical student at KPCOM. She is also a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force and is a member of the Health Professions Scholarship Program.

She has plans to pursue internal medicine residency at an active duty military base upon graduation of medical school. Her medical interests include critical care medicine, gastroenterology, and hospitalist medicine. Her hobbies include exercising, vlogging, journaling, and focusing on balance between life and medicine.

Her future career will be a beautiful combination of personalized patient care, health prevention, leadership, patient and resident advocacy, and making genuine connections with each of her patients.

AUTHOR: RACHEL PRAY

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines of varying lengths, slanted diagonally from the bottom right towards the top right, set against a blue background.