

Cotton Wool Hair

Category: Hope

written by Ezinwanneamaka Morayo Ejiofor | December 31, 2017

"How long have you been doing this?" he asked, eyes gleaming with admiration. I was unsure whether he was asking long I had been conducting patient interviews or how long I had been a medical student. I decided on the latter. "Two years," I replied with a confident smile across my chin. "Well, you're very good!." "Thank you," I replied, almost a whisper.

It was a compliment I was definitely not expecting on my first day there.

The surprise and joy mingled inside me, and I emerged in the on-call room beaming with joy and grinning from ear to ear. "Why are you so excited?" my colleague asked, the confusion spangled over her eyebrows. She could literally see the enthusiasm radiating on my skin. I was finding it impossible to contain. "I love seeing patients," I told her. Those words did not do justice to the inexpressible feeling within me.

He was my first real patient during my clinical rotations, and that was my first non-standardized patient interview. His words uplifted and encouraged me, and assured me that I was in the right profession. I will never forget him.

We formed a good student-doctor relationship, and he was happy to see me every morning even though I woke him up early to gather information for 6 a.m. ward rounds. We talked and laughed. I gave high-fives when he had bowel movements. I congratulated him when his white blood cell count decreased. Although I was off for the weekend and another student assisted with his surgery, we maintained our relationship. I checked up on him periodically, gave him answers, drew out intestines on a piece of paper to help him visualize my explanations and to ease his doubts and confusions. It brought so much joy to me just to be there for him, to watch him heal, assist in his care and to show him that the team was working tirelessly for his good.

On the day he was discharged, I unexpectedly left the room with tears in my eyes. He had a previous hip surgery but old and feeble as he was, he wore that tuft of cotton wool hair like a crown and stood up in difficulty to give me a hug. He assured me that I would be a wonderful doctor. He was confident in my abilities. My heart broke. I would possibly never see him again.

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