

Worth It

Category: A Turn for the Better

written by Sarah Stumbar | August 5, 2024

A few days ago, I welcomed our new first year medical students to the medical profession with a story. It went something like this:

I was in clinic yesterday, so I'm going to tell you a little story about clinic. I see patients in our school's mobile health center. A few weeks ago, I and the third-year student rotating with me were waiting for the last patient of the day. It was already about 3:00 p.m., so we assumed our 2:00 p.m. new patient wasn't going to show up, which isn't uncommon in our free clinic. But around 3:15, she arrived. Showing up super late isn't uncommon either. We quickly learned she is a recent immigrant from Haiti and was feeling bereft because she left her two kids behind when she got the opportunity to come to Miami.

Our Haitian nurse translated for us through the patient's tears. Eventually, she told us she has diabetes; her sugar was 317, which is extremely high. We learned that she hadn't been taking any medications for several months, as the safety-net hospital had become too expensive. She felt terrible overall and reported dizziness, overwhelming thirst, and pelvic pain. She'd never had a Pap smear. Her blood pressure was high.

Our dedicated clinic team flew into action. Over the next hour, we set the patient up with free diabetes medications, a glucometer, a blood pressure cuff, and a referral to a therapist. We drew comprehensive blood and urine tests. After much explanation, and an opportunity for the patient to familiarize herself with the speculum, the third-year student performed her first Pap smear ever.

In the end, the huge smile from the patient showed me she was grateful for this slight turn for the better in a country that had been feeling so unforgiving to her. After the patient left the clinic, her arms full of tools to help her manage her disease, the third-year student turned to me and just said, "It was all worth it."

So, as you start medical school, I want you to remember that this is you in two years. The path to becoming a doctor is long, but it passes quickly in a flurry of studying and patients. And there will be many moments when you realize that the studying, the sacrifices, the big dreams—they were all worth it.

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