

# Seeing Patients for the First Time

Category: Hope

written by Anna Delamerced | December 2, 2016

I wish I could see his eyes, hidden beneath a pair of shades. A tweed cap, or as I like to think of it, the “grandpa cap,” covers his head. With his hands resting on a cane, he leans his back against the chair.

My medical education has trained me to observe and ask questions. We go over the chief complaint, the past medical history, current problems, family history. We go over allergies and medications, surgeries and hospitalizations. He answers kindly, understanding I’m just a medical student who is still learning. I jot down hypertension, statins, penicillin. He also discloses he has HIV.

I don’t want to pass this by. I don’t want to jump into the next set of questions, the review of systems, the vital signs. I want to hear his story.

“Can you tell me more?” I ask him.

He ekes out a thin smile, and beneath the shades, it seems like his eyes are smiling, too.

During the next few minutes, he dives deep into his past. He reveals a history of hurt and heroin, pain and mistakes. He talks about his brothers, his family – how they all tried to help him. One day, his wife told him something has to change. He took a good look at himself and realized he needed help. He came here, to this clinic, decades ago, and he is thankful.

“I’m alive. I didn’t think I would be here.”

I sit in awe, humbled.

“What kept you going?” I ask.

He takes off his sunglasses and smiles again. “Faith, hope and love.”

As I meet more patients and hear their stories, this is a theme I have noticed—and embraced. Medications may keep a person alive, but perhaps it is something bigger, something greater, that keeps them going.

He is one of the many patients who have reminded me that medicine is so much more than prescriptions and biology. It’s more than just taking the history. I wanna hear his story.

As our time is ending, I thank him, and our eyes meet.

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