

The Transition

Category: The Waiting Room

written by Brie Chun | May 7, 2016

As a medical student, I would show up to clinic the first day of my rotation and introduce myself to the receptionist. Standing there in the waiting room, conspicuous in my short, white coat, and referring to myself as “the new medical student,” I’d feel the patients’ gaze. The receptionist would wave me to the clinic, and I would sigh with relief.

In time I learned to stride through the waiting room without stopping, and it felt like a small privilege, the tiniest hit that I might actually belong *behind* the door and one day have my name printed on it.

As a fourth-year, I showed up to a new clinic, but this time as a patient. Instead of cutting through the waiting room, I had to wait. And wait I did, with simmering impatience. Had I become so used to the privilege afforded to me by my white—albeit short—coat? I sighed with some resignation when the nurse finally called my name. I was surprised that my voice sounded higher than normal as I followed her through the doors, and I realized that my frustration with waiting had more to do with nervousness about my appointment than with a sense of injustice that I had been denied an entitlement.

In time, being a patient changed the way I experienced waiting rooms. Rather than being a thoroughfare to pass through as quickly as possible, it became what it was meant to be: a place for . . . waiting. And I think I gained an appreciation of what it means to be a patient.

In retrospect, I realize that the transition from student to physician is gradual, and it began the moment I received my acceptance letter. My goals and visions for my career keep changing, and I have changed as well. Not all of it is bad. I can assert myself with some confidence, examine patients with facility, and gather a history without stammering or blushing.

As I am growing into my professional identity, my relationship to places like the waiting room has shifted. I only hope that my relationship to patients will not.

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