

Inner Turmoil

Category: Stress and Burnout
written by Anonymous | May 14, 2017

As a third-year medical student, I know I have a beautiful purpose in life. I care deeply about my patients. But the one person I am having difficulty treating is myself.

Daily, I struggle with the stress of preparing for the next stage of my career—applying for a residency in dermatology. Can it really be less than three years ago that I was filled with exuberance and happiness during my first-year White Coat Ceremony? That I was basking in the accomplishment of starting my journey through the promised land of a life serving patients?

But nowadays, I find it nearly impossible to resist the temptation to immerse myself in computer games instead of researching patient charts. I find myself regularly thinking, *I hope this patient doesn't show up so I can go home early*. These are battles that I am losing, badly. Yet I care immensely about my patients, otherwise I wouldn't have chosen medicine. But how do I care for myself?

I am reinforced by my colleagues and teachers. I do not lack the intelligence to make wise decisions. But I'm not executing, as my basketball coach used to tell me. I feel like I'm being barraged from every imaginable angle, left defenseless with an unopened solutions guide. *That isn't good enough. Did I include all of the patient's history? Do I have enough research? Will program directors even like me?* It's completely normal to be worried; anxiety fosters preparation. But immobilization, paralysis due to internal anguish, is pathognomonic for a problem. During times of mental despair, self-hatred is channeled into negativity that penetrates the heart and clouds any flicker of optimism.

When I greet a patient suffering from anxiety or depression, I know that I can show empathy on the surface, but I am aware that I lack true comprehension of the pain they are experiencing inside. I know about wounds that are hidden from the naked eye.

Life moves steadily forward. I rely on my classmates, preceptors and patients for support to conquer the honorable enemy wreaking havoc within me. As a future physician, I have gained the knowledge and humility to realize that we are not indestructible; rather, we are vulnerable. However, we are given the tools to combat these seemingly treacherous illnesses. No sacrifice is worth it.

Every morning when I open my eyes, I remind myself that I am here for a beautiful purpose.

Anonymous