

Contagious

Category: Feeling Anxious

written by Lauren Tholemeier | August 7, 2018

I walked into the conference room to see an anxious classmate named James talking to Troy. That particular day he was worried about “The Match”: the process of applying to medical residency. The familiar feeling of tightness in my chest came back as I couldn’t help but overhear James ponder every permutation of what can go wrong in the process. After several minutes of this, I was frustrated. I sent a text to my friend sitting in another part of classroom to complain: *James... I can't right now.*

My friend commiserated: *No self awareness.*

That night I had dinner with a friend who just started residency. I shared with her all of my fears: whether I’ll be a good doctor, whether I’ll be tired and unhappy, and whether I’ll get out of shape in residency. Later on I realized that I had done to my friend what James did to our class: unleashed the burden of my anxiety on a bystander. My friend probably left that conversation feeling as frustrated as I did earlier.

Another time I was chatting with a security guard in our medical education building who was telling me about an interaction with a rude student. The student had left her ID badge at home and made a scene when the guard wouldn’t let her in. She went on about how much money she pays to go to school and how ridiculous it was that the guard didn’t trust her. The guard was just trying to do her job.

Clinic days are notoriously stressful due to the high patient volume and low resources, so I try to help by picking up lunch for our team at Panera. Two weeks ago they left out our fellow’s sandwich, and she didn’t eat all day. Last week they omitted another item. Instead of simply asking for the item, I unleashed my frustration on the nearest employee: “I have never once gotten a correct order from this store. Why can’t you get it together?”

Moments like these scare me. If I lose my patience as a student, how will future stresses affect me? Will the inability to control my anxiety be a burden on others? Before I know it, I’m worried about worrying. Anxious about anxiety.

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