

Healing: A Medical Student's Perspective

Category: Suicide

written by Anonymous | February 14, 2023

Once, I accidentally burned my hair while turning it flamingo pink. As I slowly cut off the long, singed locks, with scissors too small for one clean cut, I was surprised by how light I felt with each snip. "Touché," I chuckled to myself.

When I first started experiencing suicidal ideation, I used studying as a coping mechanism to escape my thought spirals. When that failed, I engaged in "harmless" self-destructive behavior. I only vaguely acknowledged the cycle I'd fallen into, because I was managing to keep all the "essential" things in my life, such as my grades and interpersonal relationships, in order.

But by my third year of med school, I had run out of the energy needed to maintain the facade. I started growing distant from friends and family and buried myself further in my work. Predictable and rewarding, my studies helped me escape my thoughts—for a while. Then I got sick and developed a persistent low-grade fever with weight loss, insomnia, and chronic fatigue; burnout was hitting.

Something had to change. At 2:00 a.m. one summer night, I called my sister. As I finally managed to cry, her support helped me find the resolve to seek therapy. Over the next few months, slowly but surely, my outlook on life started shifting as I began challenging beliefs like "I am not enough," "Some damage cannot be undone," and "It wouldn't make any difference if I ceased to exist."

Healing requires cultivating compassion for yourself and your inner child. It requires patience and constant reminders that thoughts are temporary and that life is precious. Sometimes it is the love I receive from people around me that keeps me going; other times, I find strength by reminding myself that my profession will allow me to alleviate people's suffering. The healing curve is not linear. On some days, my coffee tastes painfully bitter; on others, it is suspiciously sweet. I drink it anyway.

Stress in medical school can become debilitating, especially when you have other risk factors, such as pre-existing mental health conditions or a difficult childhood. It is essential to recognize the signs of deteriorating mental health and seek help from loved ones and professionals. Taking this journey, I have learned that—just like cutting off burnt hair—it is only when we let the weight of negative thoughts lift that we truly appreciate how beautiful life in health care can be.

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The National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number is 988.
The Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support
to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress
24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States.
Call or text 988 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.