

The Therapist in a Box

Category: Suicide

written by Chelsea Cosner | February 7, 2023

Growing up, I always got wonderful gifts from Hope, my mom's best friend since high school. She would get me colorful knee socks, puzzles she designed herself as a professional artist, and confetti that spelled my name.

One of the presents she got me, however, has confounded me over the years, even though I have treasured it. The "therapist in a box" came with a timer, a mini couch, a tongue-in-cheek book on the history of therapy as well as silly psychiatry quotes. It boasted on the box that the therapist "won't leave you in August!", a jab at psychoanalysts who take the whole summer month off.

Up to this point, I had never expressed any interest in mental health. Like many doctors-to-be, there was something in me, a cliché love of science and desire to help others, that had inspired me from a young age to pursue medicine. My grandmother's fondness for M*A*S*H and my mom's childhood dream of becoming a neurosurgeon probably didn't hurt either. On paper, psychiatry made sense for me. I loved reading books and hearing people's stories, and I was curious to understand the mind and science in general. Like many medical students though, it wouldn't be until my clerkships that I decided that psychiatry was for me. Had Hope seen something in me that I hadn't seen? Did she see the things in me that let her know that I would one day be a psychiatrist myself?

Maybe Hope just knew that we all could benefit from taking care of our mental health. Hope was an amazing person, with a full and creative life. She also had major depression. When I was in high school, she died by suicide. Seeing the impact on those she loved and the loss it left was indescribable.

When I got my first outpatient office as a psychiatry resident, I put the therapist in a box in my desk. It reminds me of some of the humor in being a psychiatrist and the humanity of every encounter. It reminds me to ask a few more questions if things don't feel right, and to give myself grace for my own mental health. Everyone is someone's best friend, favorite gift giver, partner, an artist and their own person who needs help. We are too precious to lose if we can prevent it.

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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.