

To My Patients

I am sorry.

I am sorry to rush
I am sorry to not listen
To not touch.

I am sorry you feel like you were not heard
or seen
I am sorry you waited hours just to be shuffled out the door.

This is not what I imagined
when I went back to school at age 37
premeds, masters,
med school, residency.

All those sleepless nights
studying,
exams,
missing life events.
In pursuit
In honor
of a bigger picture, a bigger goal.
Heartache, stress, sacrifice.

I did not imagine this,
Less than one year out and completely disillusioned.

Work faster
faster,
faster.
If only you would focus
Concentrate harder
See more patients.
15 minutes.

But
I can't go any faster
I cannot think
This is someone's life
Someone's pain

Every day
I cry on the train
I mourn as I try to fall asleep at night
Processing
All my patients' stories
Wishing I had had more time.
But 15 minutes, patients are waiting...

I do not feel safe.

Productivity, Efficiency: my job description.

What happened to the healing, the clinical reasoning?

There is no time.

All those years gaining knowledge?

Doesn't matter.

Just clicks through "best practices"

"quality" metrics, to measure a doctor.

But the patient in front of me,

Ignored.

They want to talk about

fears,

their bodies,

sadness,

losses,

traumas,

barriers to healing.

That takes time

for which the system

allows none.

I feel gross every day.

Cognitive dissonance.

Once inspired by

Malcolm and Huey and Fred

Audre Angela and Fanny Lou

Fanny Lin and Beatrice

Now part of the problem.

It all feels impossible

But I have to continue.

The journey, expensive

I owe time and money

to the government.

So, I learn how to

not listen

push humans through

and forget my skills.

and all the years of study.

No way out

trapped

in an unjust

capitalist complex,

a pawn.

So many bigger dreams and beliefs, now foggy.
Numbers, numbers, numbers.
This Is Not What I Believe.

I am sorry you feel angry at your doctor,
I agree.
I am sorry going to the doctor
Is just one more trauma.
I am sorry for my role.

One day I hope to do better,
This I Truly Believe: there has got to be a better way.

We, patients and doctors,
need to band together for a more just system
because this one *is* doing harm.

I wrote the above words in February 2020, months after graduating residency and becoming an attending, completely dejected, sitting shiva for a profession, trying to process my daily discomfort.

COVID19, the protests after the killing of George Floyd - directly connected, laid bare a failing system. Every day before, during, and after COVID19, we intimately witness the direct and long-term effects of the illnesses that this country's foundation is built on and that continue to plague it: racism, poverty, violence, materialism – and we feel daily the gravity of medicine's shortcomings and inequities, as our health as a society is worsening. We cannot continue to accept structures that were not made by us or for us. We need to challenge and bring new perspective and ideas - tearing down the infected and building humanity and health for patients.

15 minutes is not for patients, but for a broken business defined by productivity and efficiency, breaking doctors and patients alike, asking for the impossible - leaving fertile ground for mistakes and biases, overlooking real needs. *This is primary care:* the same refrain echoed over and over... But it should not be - we need to imagine a different way. Health care for profit leads to negative outcomes for both patients and their doctors. If we, as physicians, are committed to ending institutional racism, we need to look at our place of work, particularly those of us serving marginalized populations - although our intent may be good, how are we allowing the very harms we are dedicated to preventing to continue, and *for whom?*

Our patients – ourselves - do not want to be treated like a commodity or a cog; they - we - want to be SEEN, heard, and listened to – and, *This I Believe*, is where the real healing, the real medicine, the real revolution lives.

-Sarah D. Baden, MD
7.13.2020