



Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal

Listening as Healing

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My understanding of the importance of cultural competence has developed just as much in clinics and hospitals as in a small classroom in the South Bronx on weekend afternoons. Through a group called Community Conversations, I have the opportunity to sit with other trainees, medical providers, and local community members as they graciously share their difficult experiences in the healthcare system. Their heartbreaking stories show me how much work we as providers must do to rebuild trust with our patients, especially those who are of marginalized identities. Many of the attendees at Community Conversations are low-income individuals of color who have been systematically harmed by both our biased medical framework as well as by other institutional processes like redlining, food deserts, and climate change that have further impacted their health. One woman shared about being turned away by her OB-GYN when she knew she was in labor, leading to her having to give birth at home in an unsanitary setting

with no medical care. She felt frustrated that her providers did not listen to her while she tried to communicate the messages her body was sending. Another man opened up about the trauma of being consistently labeled as drug-seeking, rather than being seen with compassion for his use disorders. This discrimination prevented him from seeking care, resulting in the exacerbation of his medical conditions, which then caused him to present to hospitals in urgent situations where he felt judged for his state of health. This debilitating cycle repeats ad nauseam every day for so many patients in our medical system, and we must do better.

At every meeting, I am humbled by the vulnerability of our patients- my neighbors who will revisit some of the most traumatic experiences in their lives in order to help repair these broken healthcare relationships. Their willingness to give of themselves so that we providers can improve for others is selfless. I know I have immense privilege to attend, and I never take it for granted. I must do better for my patients: both by listening to them on an individual level and advocating on a systemic level to

meet their needs.

One way I do this work is as a legislative fellow through my local chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program (PHNP) in support of the New York Health Act, which would provide universal healthcare access to all New Yorkers. Fellows meet regularly to prepare for a lobby day, which involves organizing meetings between community members, stakeholders, and legislators to build support for the plan. Given how deeply moved I have been by patients sharing their stories about how the healthcare system has failed them and ways we can do better, I am passionate about amplifying their voices within our government to enact policies that will support their well-being. I believe that anyone who provides care- whether through politics or medicine- should be in constant conversation with those they are serving. I am grateful to do so through this position, and I will continue to seek similar ones out throughout my career.

To me, while Community Conversations is not a medical space, it is incredibly healing. I become a more informed, compassionate provider at every meeting, and I know that listening to my patients is among the most crucial skills I will use in my career. I feel motivated to be a medical provider who has deep roots in her

community and seeks their input in the care she provides. I will continue to educate myself on historical, political, and structural inequities, and take action- through direct clinical care, research, legislative work, and political advocacy- to make a more equitable system. Every single individual deserves to be well and to trust in the care they are receiving. I look forward to being part of the solution. When I am serving others in a comprehensive, inclusive, and educated way, I become my best self.

The Cheetah in All of Us

One of the first books my impromptu pandemic book club read was called “Untamed” by Glennon Doyle. Though I initially was unsure if I would enjoy it, I ended up tearing through its pages in one day. The memoir starts with Doyle feeling trapped by various expectations of being a woman in modern-day society. For Doyle, these restrictive forces included heterosexuality, diet culture, religion, and being a “perfect” mother and wife. She lashed out in various ways: binge-drinking alcohol, bingeing and purging food, and throwing herself into a marriage that was no longer healthy. She spent so much of her time feeling like the restrictions around her were growing smaller and smaller until she would have to explode. It broke my heart to read about how she felt she had to betray her

true self in order to survive.

As she described how caged these expectations made her feel, using the experience of watching a trapped cheetah at the zoo trained to chase around a stuffed animal, I felt the weight of her burdens travel through the pages. In different ways, many of us were stuck in situations that prevented us from being our most complete selves, chasing distractions that didn't serve us.

Reading about her struggles made me consider what it truly means to be "well." While Doyle might have presented healthily in social situations or even at a doctor's office, her heart, mind, and physical body were not in good shape. Not having healthy outlets for her personal insecurities and the weight of societal expectations pushed her to a breaking point. I want to be a provider that is able to elicit patients' concerns, care for them in every way I can, and connect them with resources to meet the needs I myself cannot.

I feel so grateful to have been able to read this book and get to know the intimacy of Doyle's thoughts and needs. While I understand that what every patient shares with their healthcare provider is up to them, I want to be open to hearing these deep-seated concerns. I want to create an open and welcoming environment that repairs the mistrust that many people especially those

who have been systematically discriminated against- may have towards their doctors. I will also be sure never to dismiss a patient's concerns, but rather educate myself on the ways that mental, structural, and physical difficulties impact wellbeing.

On a personal level, this book also encouraged me to take a look at the ways I myself was the caged cheetah. Insecurity sows deep into all of us, and causes us to have beliefs that limit us. To be the best medical provider, friend, sister, and student that I could be, I needed to strengthen my resolve against toxic cultures and systems that distract me from taking care of myself. It is only when I show myself compassion that I can flourish, both in the service of myself and others.

Biography

Vivian Kim (she/her) is a third-year medical student at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx, New York. She is passionate about harm reduction, health equity, and pediatrics. She serves as a legislative advocacy fellow in the NY Metro chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program and holds leadership positions in her school's chapters of Students for Prison Health Equity, Reparations, and Empowerment (SPHERE)

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and Medical Students for Choice (MSFC).

Her written works have appeared in publications including MedPage Today and the British Medical Journal.