Residency – A Box of Crayons

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Abstract
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Residency – A Box of Crayons

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A few weeks ago, as I was spending time with my 6-year-old grandson, we embarked on one of our favorite activities together – drawing and coloring pictures. There on the dining room table was blank paper and a 96-count box of crayons I had bought for him a few weeks back. I was immediately struck by the crayons lying on the table and those still in the box. There on the table were many crayons, some without their paper wrapping, some broken in half, some barely used, some with glitter and standing erect in the back of the box, and a few, namely the green crayon, without its wrapping and about one inch in length. At that moment, I was struck by how much this box of crayons might represent residency training.

No one will argue that residency is hard – whether it’s a three to seven-year residency, there must be times that it feels like it will never end. The sleepless nights on call, difficult patients, administrative burden, mile stones, core competencies, duty hours, and never enough time to be with the people you love and care about in your lives. But like the box of crayons, there is a lesson to be learned here.

My grandson showed me the many pictures he had drawn and colored in the past couple of weeks. Which brings me back to the green crayon. In every picture, the green crayon was the foundation for all his pictures. I realized at that time how valuable this crayon had been for my budding artist. So, for you, I ask this question, “What kind of crayon do you want to be as you go through this rite of passage called “graduate medical education”? Do you want to be like the shiny, fluorescent crayon/physician who does just enough to provide care but doesn’t really utilize their skills to the best of their ability. And I would also venture to say that most physicians are like the primary care crayons — good, solid physicians who care about their patients and do an excellent job with their health care – absolutely nothing wrong with that. But in thinking about the crayons, I think any patient would be blessed to have a green crayon as a physician. Never the top of their class, never the flashiest individual, and never the one who complains about working hard for their patients. This is the physician who gives a follow-up phone call after a procedure, who sits down in the exam room and asks the question, “tell me about you” or admits they may have made a misguided decision in their patient’s health care journey but always continue to put their patients first.

I think about the physicians in my life that have provided my care. I’ve been fortunate to have had many excellent physicians who have cared about my health and really tried to get to know me as a person. Many green crayons and I am very thankful for them. Being a physician is still honorable, still the backbone of what makes living in the United States such a privilege, when it comes to health care.

As you traverse the rigors of residency, I hope you ask yourself the question, “what kind of crayon/physician do I want to be?” I hope you think about the green crayon and what it could mean for your career. Good luck on your journey!

In thinking about the overall spectrum of health care providers, I venture to guess that many patients will probably see the shiny, fluorescent crayon/physician who does just enough to provide care but doesn’t really utilize their skills to the best of their ability. And I would also venture to say that most physicians are like the primary care crayons — good, solid physicians who care about their patients and do an excellent job with their health care – absolutely nothing wrong with that. But in thinking about the crayons, I think any patient would be blessed to have a green crayon as a physician. Never the top of their class, never the flashiest individual, and never the one who complains about working hard for their patients. This is the physician who gives a follow-up phone call after a procedure, who sits down in the exam room and asks the question, “tell me about you” or admits they may have made a misguided decision in their patient’s health care journey but always continue to put their patients first.

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