

Through the generosity of Charles R. Millikan, D. Min., vice president for spiritual care and values integration, an annual award competition was established at The Methodist Hospital among the resident staff. For the inaugural competition, residents submitted a poem or essay of 1,000 words or less for the topic, "On Being a Doctor." A committee of 5 was selected from The Methodist Hospital Education Institute to judge the entries. Criteria for judging were established by this committee. The 2nd place winning essay is herein published. The 3rd place winning entry will be published in the next issue of this journal.

RACECAR

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"Gentlemen, start your engines..." This commonly known phrase will always hold a deeper meaning with me for the rest of my career and life. As physicians, we may not remember every detail about the patients we encounter, but there are some that we can never forget. During residency, we learn that being a doctor is not about the regulated minutes and hours. On the contrary, those minutes, hours, and moments give us opportunities. These opportunities shape our qualities and beliefs that represent the essence of our core as a professional healthcare provider.

"Good morning Racecar, always good to see you." Every day that greeting made me chuckle, because it represented a small symbol of the relationship he and I forged over many weeks as patient and doctor. The path we took to get there is one I will never forget. He had a significant history with multiple comorbidities and previous kidney and pancreas transplants. Over the weekend, the patient came to our hospital for scrotal pain. Initially, he was diagnosed with epididymitis and treated accordingly. As I returned to work the following Monday, our role was to monitor his transplant graft function. Something was not right. This is where I learned a valuable lesson; look beneath the surface. Over the next 24 hours, the patient's clinical exam worsened, and it became apparent that he did not have the initial diagnosis. He was found to have Fournier's gangrene requiring immediate surgical intervention. As I sat there explaining to him the procedure and the reasons for surgery, I could see the fear in his eyes. It was in this instance that I was given one of those moments to make a difference. We had a long and meaningful conversation which put his mind at ease. He said he had faith and trust in me and our team in order to accomplish whatever needed to be done, and he did not feel alone.

As expected, his debridement became more extensive after initial exploration. He was in critical condition post operatively. During this time, I began to converse with his father who soon arrived after hearing of his son's illness. Once again, there were multiple questions that needed answers. As a resident caring for his son, I was given the chance to continually communicate the different aspects of his case and management. It was clear to me the only thing I needed in order to instill hope and compassion was time. During his admission, numerous specialty medical and surgical

teams cared for the patient. Yet, with all of our specialists and their individual components to his plan, he always looked to me for understanding. I took this opportunity each day as a privilege, not a burden. No one can make another person "care" for someone. We have to recognize the opportunity that is laid before us and seize that moment. After we discussed the different management strategies, we would also talk about his life. The conversation would range from his home to hobbies to his future plans. As in our discussions of his medical care, these other times further strengthened our relationship and, in turn, his trust in me as his doctor.

As he recovered in the following weeks on the ward floor, he gave me the alias of "Racecar." I was puzzled and a little concerned. I soon learned though, that he was a huge racing fan, and that I reminded him of his favorite famous driver. That title represented more than just a celebrity look alike. It represented many different things. If you have ever seen a race, it appears that the "racecars" just drive around in laps over and over again. They go many miles but never go anywhere. Sometimes as doctors, I think we can feel like this. Rounds in the hospital, same patients every day, slow progress in their recovery, progress notes, and all of our daily tasks can become redundant. But more importantly, I have learned that in the races he watches, the driver wins or loses depending on the pit stops, not the number of laps. This is the lesson he taught me without even realizing it.

Humbly, I accept the name "Racecar" as a personal badge to remind myself of the responsibilities that lay before me. When our lives get stressed and hectic, I remember this simple name to regain perspective. The chances we have to make a difference in the lives of our patients and their families are not taken for granted. Equally as important as the number of laps around the hospital and cases performed each day are the stops we make with our patients and each other. We can all be "racecars" moving fast to provide the best care possible for our patients. We cannot forget though, to stop, park, and take the time to talk with our patients. In those instances, we break down barriers, build relationships, and create hope and healing. This, my fellow colleagues and friends, is how we will win the race!