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Laughter is the Best Medicine

By Brittany Warren

The room smells of death
Will she open her eyes now
Time to call the priest

From a young age we are told that laughter is the best medicine. As training physicians, we soon discover that laughter falls short of treating every ailment. We spend two years in the classroom dedicating ourselves to the understanding of the human body and the diseases that plague it. Part of that training includes learning the drugs that will help cure those diseases. At what point did we learn about laughter in Pharmacology? A once bright eyed and eager to learn medical student can be quickly silenced as death strolls into their patient's room and takes them for its own. Wait, the books never told me how to handle that.

We spend so much time figuring out what's best for the

patient often forgetting about ourselves. What's that old adage though? Laughter is the best medicine? This may be one of the most important lessons I will learn while in medical school. Sickness and death take patients hostage everyday on the wards. In order to keep from internalizing your feelings one must learn to make light of the situation. You learn to do everything in your power to help a patient, to keep them breathing, to keep their eyes open, but sometimes your best is not good enough. This is when your patient has one foot out the door and your attending jokingly tells the resident to, "Call the priest." A joke? Now? When this first happened to me I sat there wondering how making a joke could ever be appropriate. Now, not only was the imminent death of the patient eating away at me, but so was the one liner. As my patient's face haunted my thoughts, my emotions began to overcome me. "You need to be stronger," I told myself, it was only my first day on the floor after all. At that point I thought of the one liner and a hint of a smile slowly etched itself across my face. It was then that I realized that the joke was not at the expense of the patient, but rather as a form of self-preservation for the attending.

It was hard lesson to learn and I am sure that it is a lesson with many layers that I will continue to grow from, but it was that day that I learned that perhaps laughter can be the best medicine.

