

Imagine

By Amanda Percy

Imagine your young child, happy, playful, and intent on living life to the fullest. A child who is the most important being in your life. You would give the world for them. They have immense life to live and mammoth amounts of people to touch in some way. Now think how you would feel if that very same child was diagnosed with cancer. Only having a few months to a year to live. Moments of life torn away before they were experienced. Pure innocence instantly completing metamorphosis into fear, fear for that which will not be able to be experienced.

Disease for any person, any age, and any culture can be the greatest change that will impact their life. It can change every aspect within their routine and existence. Family gatherings will never be the same. That donut you really are craving, gives you nausea. That beautiful golden blonde hair you have been complimented on so many times—vanished. Nothing is the same ever again. Disease does not discriminate; it has blind eyes.

Each breath can be her/his last for a patient in this situation; however, this scenario is the every day for physicians. Processing patient after patient, moved from one diagnosis to another without a skipped beat. Not thinking twice about how the words “you have cancer” can make a patient’s once productive and fulfilling life drastically come to a screeching halt. After those words, all the patient can think is that disease and diagnosis. Physicians, on the other hand, are taught to not get too involved and to mold themselves to avoid the pain their patients must now endure. Emotionally uninvolved, physicians move on with their day as if “cancer” isn’t a bad word. I ask though, “What is wrong with seeing that a patient is more than a diagnosis?” Why not take a moment and think “What if this was me, or my mother?” If a physician thinks of how she/he would like to be treated, maybe the “mundaneness” of another disease diagnosis would diminish a little. This idea goes back to the most basic of ideas; treat others as you wish to be treated. How is it with 8 years plus of

intense medical education that the primary rule we learn as young children fades?

On the other hand, doctors cannot be fully involved emotionally in every person they see and treat. The fact is people die—young, old and everyone in between. It is impossible to think that doctors should be able to endure heartbreak after heartbreak when patients pass or become seriously ill. Despite what many think within the profession, doctors are not super human. We are purely human. The idea that medicine has to be desensitized is flawed. The practice of medicine is simply interacting and communicating with people. It is sharing a human touch, and it may be the most sensitive encounter there is. Why reduce this genuine contact to nothing more than a cold progress note in the chart? Patients come to physician looking for a medical answer but also more. They seek understanding and someone to legitimize their feelings. All they want is someone to say, “It is ok, and I’m here for you.” No we can’t fix every problem, but a doctor can always provide support—whether physical, emotional, or psychological. A doctor needs to be a parent in their undying compassion, an intellectual in their seek for constant knowledge, and most importantly a friend, for each patient we touch is a link in the vast community of humanity.

