

The Vitamin K Deficiency

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We were young, in love, and in medical school. We scheduled our wedding for the first day of spring break. I had three final exams the week of our wedding. I was already under a great deal of stress when I found out two days before the wedding, right after my second exam, that our reception arrangements were inadequate. We had booked an indoor basketball court at no charge, but at the last minute we found out that security was required. We had not planned on this additional fee. Although the additional charge was minuscule, we did not have enough money to cover the reception.

In desperation, I contacted the minority affairs dean, who was a trusted advisor. He assured me that everything would be fine. The next morning, the student affairs dean called me into his office. He gave me an envelope with enough cash money to fully cover the reception hall. (I later learned that the minority affairs dean, the student affairs dean, and several other faculty members had donated money to help cover the additional costs of the reception.) I was speechless. What could I say? I thanked him profusely, and I promised to pay all of it back as soon as I could. His reply was something that I have never forgotten. He said, “Don’t pay us back, just do something nice for another medical student.”

At the time, I had no idea what he meant, but I knew I was indebted to him and my other teachers for their kind deed. For the remainder of medical school, I did nice things for my classmates—with some success—but I never fully lived up to that charge. As a resident, with virtually no access to medical students, I did not have opportunities to “do something nice for another medical student.” I was frustrated that I had not been able to honor the request, but I continued to carry the

student affairs dean’s message in my heart.

After graduating from residency, I worked in a community health center in Bronx, New York. There, I had significant interactions with third-year medical students, and the opportunities to “do something nice” for them abounded. I also taught first and second-year medical students at the local medical college. During this time, I provided financial assistance to medical students and

I felt that I had finally paid the monetary debt back with interest. To my surprise, however, I still sought opportunities to fulfill the challenge and to “do something nice.” I enjoyed the way it made me feel, and the students’ gratitude showed. My desires for my career were changing, and I sought a teaching position so that I would always be able to influence and assist medical students. When the opportunity arose to teach full time in a medical school, I jumped at the chance. I am now a full-time

faculty member of the Florida State University College of Medicine.

Of the many experiences I had in medical school, the one that had the most profound effect on my heart, as well as my career, was a simple injection of vitamin K—kindness. In our busy roles as physicians and educators, we should always remember the ancient adage, “Patients don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” We would be wise to live this principle with our learners. Although the simple monetary portion of my debt has been repaid to multiple students, I will always try to “pay forward” the kindness shown to me.

That debt will never be paid.

