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Wise Beyond Her Years – Danielle Cavanaugh

An Interview and Narrative written by Justin Guthier, MS-III

I have worked at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine for over thirty five years. I began by working under Dr. Leonard Finkelstein, back in 1974 as a coordinator of the utilization review committee. He later became the President of PCOM. Soon after, I began working in the Psychiatry clinic. The clinic was located in the basement of Evans Hall, which was connected by a long tunnel to the City Avenue Hospital. I would interact and work with all types of people. Most were low income patients who needed to get their medications changed or regimens reassessed. In addition to the doctors, we had social workers and psychologists on staff. We could meet any needs that our patients had for their psychiatric health.

I enjoyed interacting with all the patients as they came in each day. Trust me – many, many characters made their way into my office. Part of the psychiatric clinic was the Neurosensory Unit. Those referrals would come from surrounding school districts for children who were having academic, social and personal difficulties. I would take a history from the parents and report the findings back to the group of social workers, psychologists and physicians and they would order the necessary testing. Working with parents and students was a phenomenal experience. Yet, of all the physicians I worked with in the Psychiatry unit, one doctor stands out in my mind.

Dr. George Guest was a real character. In those days, everyone smoked in the doctors' offices and Dr. Guest was no exception. No matter what time of day it was, he always had a cigar in his mouth. The charts smelled like cigars – everything smelled like cigars. Dr. Guest was the consummate physician. He was both a Psychiatrist and a Neurologist. He was, for a lack of a better word – a trip. But most importantly, he was a wonderful, caring man. Dr. Guest was an excellent lecturer as well. I would sometimes sit in his lectures. He could imitate – perfectly – the neurologic deficits of nearly every disease discussed in class. The students were enamored with his ability to teach and had a profound respect for him. Dr. Guest was also famous for serving his patients food at all different times of the day. If you were going to see him in the morning, he would have a little something to give you for break-

fast. If you had your appointment in the afternoon, he would have tea and crackers ready to share with you. Little sandwiches, coffee – his favorite snack was peanut butter and crackers. I loved working with Dr. Guest and with all the staff at the Psychiatry department. I worked there for thirteen years. Yet, new horizons were in store for me.

One day while at work, I was really upset with something – I cannot remember what it was, but I was really angry about the ways some situations and scenarios were being handled in the office. A gentleman was sitting in the waiting area. As he is sitting there, he sees that I am visibly frustrated and says “Boy, you’re angry?” He asks me what’s wrong and I go off on a tangent about how this “problem” needs to be addressed, how we should be doing this, that way – I go on for a while. As I am speaking with him, he calmly listens, nodding his head approvingly at everything I am stating. He says, “You know, I just started here, I’m new.” I said – “Oh really, you are the new . . .” looking for him to answer. He says, very matter of factly – “I’m the new CEO . . .” I froze. He continued on, “I will see what I can do about the problems you are telling me, but I am going to need a new assistant.” And that’s how I moved onto working for the CEO.

A few years later, Dr. Robert Berger, Assistant Dean of Clinical Education asked me to work for him. This is how I came to Clinical Education and I am now working with Dr. McLeod running this office. I have been here since 1991. I have seen many, many quality students come through my office. The students here are phenomenal kids, because, well you are all kids to me, of course. When we had the hospital, there were always white coats around. Now, not so much, but when we had the hospital there was a large white coat presence in my office and all around campus. I miss that. I make sure to keep this office open until 5:00 every day to give students on rotation the chance to come in and do their paperwork when convenient.

More so than years past, the students of today are a lot more rigid. I can see why – it is more competitive to get into medical school. Residencies are a lot

harder to obtain than in years past because the school enrollments are larger. Choosing rotations became easier with the Matrix – that made selection of rotations go a lot smoother. We used to officially call the Group representatives – Group leaders, but that sometimes led to problems. The biggest problems I have had with students have actually been when students within the same group do not get along and have disagreements. That is why we changed it from group leader to group representative – so the Representatives are, by their title, not held to a higher degree than the rest of their groups. A Group representative should be just like the other students but with a few extra responsibilities. We only had to impeach one group representative over the years and that was because he literally did not go to any group rep meetings and was not passing along any information to his group members. But overall, the groups have done very well during my time in this office.

Qualities of good students are the same as qualities of good physicians. Be kind and caring. Be an incredibly hard worker. Be careful what you say – your words are held to higher standards than everyone else. Most of all, have patience, for not only your patients

but everyone you work with. When you are on rotation, go into each rotation with an open mind. Try and learn from everyone: doctors, nurses, ancillary staff. See what you can get from each rotation, even if it is not your desired specialty. Never blow off your opportunity to learn. All the students are bright and when a student has problems on rotation, it is never because the work cannot be done. The problems are often related to a student who works alone or exhibits difficulties working with others. You cannot work alone in this field. You need to respect your attendings and work well with others to be a successful rotating medical student.

The most important lesson I have learned here at PCOM is the value of having patience as a professional. We are presented with many challenges which try our collective will. Students are stressed out and have a lot of pressure to succeed. I have learned that having had patience for “my patients” prepared me for this position. I do not mind taking the time to explain things and to keep students informed of their responsibilities. Take your time with your work, enjoy the journey, be polite to those around you – do not forget to read – and you will become a successful physician.

