

On Teaching and Medicine

by Jillian McCarthy



Before medical school, I was a classroom teacher in the public education system. When people ask me about my background, they often have comments or questions regarding my choices:

"Wow, those are two totally different paths!"

Well, they can be.

"Did you struggle with the transition between two unrelated fields?"

Definitely financially with the loss of a pay cheque, but I completed a Biology degree prior to education. There are many transferable skills in both fields.

"What made you change careers?"

It is not a complete change, medicine provides a path to be both a physician and a teacher.

Though the two fields may appear different, they are similar in many ways. The bare structure of medical education is quite similar to grade school. Content is delivered and students must be evaluated in some way. Behind all of this didactic and clinical learning are often compassionate individuals wishing nothing but the best for their trainees. Furthermore, both professions are responsible for providing exceptional care for those under their service and are also expected to convey complex information in understandable terms. In both settings, my lived experiences beyond lectures have been most valuable. Over the last four years, I have been surrounded by some of the most fabulous teachers that this country has to offer. Interestingly, many of them do not have any formal training in education. They are exceptional teachers because they're great at what they do, and they're great at what they do because of the teachers that came before them. When I think back to pivotal moments in my clinical training, there are fabulous teachers behind every one.

The ones who gave you enough freedom to feel valuable, but never unsafe.

The ones who sat with you for hours until a procedure was perfected.

The ones who stayed after a lengthy shift and gave "real world" advice.

The ones who provided a reassuring look while you called and participated in a code blue.

The ones who debriefed with you in a quiet back room when that same patient did not survive.

Teaching and medicine require exquisite precision to be executed effectively and with purpose. Mastering this technique in both professions is surely something to be applauded. Not every physician takes on learners or teaches every day, but for those who do, please know that you are invaluable within our healthcare system. I once had a student write [during teacher appreciation week], "Sometimes this work is really hard and I didn't

sleep good and I would rather be home, but having good teachers makes the day better so that we can learn a lot of things." If that is not the essence of medical school, then I do not know what is.

To every physician that has taught me and made each day better, I thank you.

Jillian McCarthy is currently a fourth year medical student at Memorial University and a recipient of the CFPC Medical Student Scholarship. She has served on both the Section of Medical Students as well as the Section of Teachers and hopes to one day incorporate teaching into her daily practice as a physician.