



## The face of empathy

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#### Empathy:

(n.) the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Don't confuse this with sympathy, our English teacher used to tell us. And we stored that memory in some corner of our brain, unaware of the moral dilemmas and self-questioning it would bring us in the future.

Years later, on the first day of medical school, we were reminded of this childishly learned definition. Childish because, what 12 year old could be expected to empathize with the grief they hadn't experienced, and the loss they hadn't suffered.

Never lose your sense of empathy, our Medicine Professor told us. As we sat with a twinkle in our eyes, silently resolving to engrave his words in our hearts, excited as we took the first step to fulfilling our dream of becoming doctors. Little did we know, first day resolutions seldom stand the test of time.

Clinical rotations started as we entered our second year

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and we were still unaware  
of the plight of rushing to perform a midnight delivery,  
only to have patients return  
with less than they had come with,  
only tears persisting to replace the joy.

Unaware of the distress of running overflowing OPDs  
with patients traveling from miles afar  
just to know if they would be alright.  
Unaware of the contagious smiles  
when a fractured leg starts taking baby steps,  
Unaware of the relief and the gratefulness  
Rewarded when a difficult surgery is successful.

With the passage of time,  
the sense of wonder and achievement diminish  
fulfillment and contentment in our hearts wanes  
and most are stripped of the empathy  
the resolve greatly weakened and  
the twinkle in our eyes lost  
our faces fading into the background  
unrecognizable in a sea of people  
with stethoscopes around their necks and indifference in their eyes

The face of empathy  
is starting to disappear, blurring  
as more of us give in  
to the forgiving nature of apathy  
my idle mind questioning a  
worn out yet guilty conscience  
Is it safer, if we just say  
that we tried?

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