



The Correct Spelling of Wellness

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Medical School has been a rigid experience, always a straight line to prepare for the next task that needs to be completed. From studying daily for the next exam to working in a clinic to receive a good evaluation, medical school ultimately defines your day-to-day. Learning medicine does require this stringent path, but to me, it felt as though these walls were much too staunch and narrow, leaving no room for me to explore creativity and much less my wellness.

Memorizing the vast amount of medical knowledge we were being taught revived the saying I heard so often before starting medical school, *“it’s like drinking from a fire hose.”* That fire hose might as well have been physical with how much I felt its effect. Every day, the influx of new scientific terms and anatomical vocabulary flooded my brain, leaving me feeling more sunken than the day before. It became a repetitive cycle of feeling stressed over how much content was being taught, which turned into feelings of inadequacy due to not being able to absorb all the content.

Wave after wave of information, it felt as though I’d find myself crushed beneath medical education. There was no lightness to this instruction, with each new factoid seemingly growing in weight. I knew that I needed a way to combat this stress, pressure, and repetitiveness in some way that was healthy and cathartic. Even with those criteria decided, the search for such an activity was constrained by the limitations that medical school placed on my time.

I thought back to my childhood when I wrote raps and poems for my friends and family in elementary school. Thinking about the childish quips I used to pen down, I remembered how freeing and fun it was to just create for the sake of creation. I wanted to chase that freedom again, especially in the rigid path of medicine. I decided to write more for the sake of writing and as a protection against the burnout kindling within my mind.

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Writing did not come back to me as quickly as I had hoped. It was awkward, a messy amalgamation of words splattered against the page as if a toddler babbled. I felt shame for wanting to restart. I felt shame in every pitiful poem I wrote. This shame shunned me from writing, from the creative wellness I sought. Even though my writing was clumsy, I continued with it. Eventually, I started to feel that same freedom I once felt. I did not magically get better. In fact, I'd hazard a guess to say I stayed the same as my elementary school self in my writing prowess. Letting go of the expectations of grandeur lifted a weight off my shoulders and allowed me to be happy, just letting out my emotions in the form of poems.

Halfway through my first year of medical school, the Covid-19 pandemic began, combining the difficulties of medical school with the isolation of the virus. Again, I felt overwhelmed, waking up day after day doing nothing but watching lectures and going back to sleep. I employed new tactics to take on this new challenge. I began writing while taking walks outdoors, sitting in the parks under shade, and on the edge of Lake Mendota. The rustle of the leaves and the turbulence of the water's surface were my company as my pen spilled my thoughts on paper. The isolation I once felt became a source of tranquility, a respite from the hustle and bustle of in-person activities and social obligations. I found comfort in the things that I could not change.

I transitioned from didactics to clinicals during the pandemic. My transition to clinical rotations was unique, as I moved back to my hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin to take part in the Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health MD track. Doing clinical rotations in Milwaukee and working closely with the underserved lit a fire under me and made me more excited to learn to become a physician. It also helped that my family still lived in Milwaukee and was always a 10-min drive away. Being able to see my family and our dogs whenever I wanted made the long clinical days easier to manage. I continued writing my poems, and they transformed into celebrations of hope. The change in scenery, being closer to my family and doing the type of medicine I always envisioned combatted the burnout I felt from didactics. Although the light at the end of the tunnel was far, I could now finally see it.

As I continued through medical school toward the finish line that was graduation, the heaviness of my future weighed on me. Sub-internships, STEP exams, and starting my application to residencies heightened the anxiety I harbored about my future. During this time, discussions with friends about their worries helped relieve my own. Commiserating in our collective misery during one of the most stressful periods in our lives became a source of wellness for all of us. We spoke about the hardships of applications, reviewed each other's personal statements, and gave positive affirmations to support one another. This was a different form of wellness, but made me realize how similar it was to the wellness I found in writing. The words of support my friends gave healed me in the same way as the thoughts I expelled in writing healed.

As my time in medical school draws to a close and I inch closer to my next chapter in the healthcare industry, I look back with fondness. Through all the trials and tribulations thrown my way during medical school, I somehow emerged on the other

side in one piece. As I read again the musings of my experiences in medical school, I am content with how I perceived wellness to look like for me. The wellness that I cultivated and will take with me on my next step as a resident may not look the same as what wellness means to you. If I could leave you, the reader, with one sliver of advice, it'd be to seek the language of your unique wellness style early, because there is no correct spelling of wellness.