

VOICES FROM THE HOUSE STAFF



UNIVERSITY OF UTAH HEALTH

Voices from the House Staff 2023

A collection of 55-word
stories from residents and
fellows at the University of
Utah

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16:23 • Jessie Smith

A slip.
A fall.
Therapeutically anticoagulated.
Massive intracranial hemorrhage.
His brother can't bear it.
He drops his hand.

Alone.

Breathe.
Pause.
A thready pulse.
A longer pause.
No carotid pulsation.
Time of death: 16:23.

Smiling faces at Rio Tinto.
"You're here in spirit!!"
Time of text: 16:23.

A chasm exists.
My two worlds.

Labels • Natalie Tedford

Can be helpful in describing disease
processes
May ease communication between the
healthcare team
Fail to capture the whole person we
attempt to treat and care for
Must be used with caution and can be
harmful
Are words that cannot replace the
complexity of people

Building rapport • Kristen Durbin

She materializes on screen in her usual
sunny spot, but her kind face has lost its
warmth, the
void tangible across miles between my
screen and hers. We wonder how to
rekindle that
brightness, to keep her safe.

Later, we meet in a blinding fluorescent
room. She takes my hand.
“Thank you for being here.”

Among Friends • David Haak

One day I arrived to work,
looked around the team room,
and recognized only the diseases.
I looked at cirrhosis.
It looked at me.
Though the platelets remained a point of
contention,
we decided to meet weekly and check in.
To date it's been as dutiful and reliable as
anyone could ask of a friend.

Just a Little Lighter • Omar Rachdi

To the struggles that only you know
That you wrestle with

To the struggles that only you know
You have to fight against

To the struggles that only you think
You have to hide and die with:
I hope those struggles can get
A little lighter
And possibly shared,
With another

Long Call Day • Benjamin Gow-Lee

"Beep beep beep" goes the pager.

Another cross-cover problem.

"Beep beep beep beep."

Another nurse to call back.

"Beep beep beep beep."

Another admission.

"Beep beep beep beep."

Another rapid response.

"Beep beep beep beep."

Another code.

"Beep beep beep beep."

Why can't it all just stop?

"Beep beep beep beep."

Another chance to help.

**Powerless Graduate Year 1 • Brenna K
Brown**

He went by Joe. I helped him die.
While others squandered blood, pitched
fantastical procedures...
I did not.
Arriving earlier each day, heard his story,
watched him suffer,
felt his tender abdomen and growing
resolve of will.
My power: intern, witness, to amplify his
voice on weary-go-morning-rounds.
Bringing his ending to bear as he wished.

Space • Kristen Durbin

"Where will you go next?" people ask,
dying to know my answer.
In each "I don't know," I have space to
live out answers, empowered to walk the
path as it unfolds.
"I don't know" brought me here, to these
aspen-dotted high desert mountains, to
someone I
choose to love wholeheartedly.
We'll see what's next.

Progress • Laura Fitzgerald

As female physicians,
Workplace sexism is an everyday reality.

“Nurse?”

“Oh, sweetheart.”

“When will I get to see a doctor?”

Then, refreshingly, an observant mother:
“Wow, I haven’t seen a single male
physician the entire time we’ve been here
- talk about girl power!”

You hope her teenage daughter notices;
This is for her.

Water • Liam Clark

For self care, they say to "fill your cup."
We are not cups.
We are the water.
When a cup is empty, turned over, drunk
up
You turn it upright again, fill it again.
A cup cannot be abused.
When a spring is drained
we bloody our fingernails digging at the
dust.

Last Call • Victoria Brown

"Are you even a doctor?"
Moving puzzle pieces knowing none fit
Try again
And try again to relate
Doubts run my mind
See you in a month
A welcomed no show
Never to be seen again
And now I must tell your mom why
Like I ever had the chance to help you

Other • Omar Rachdi

I love watching a brother,
Or really anyone labeled as

Other

Doing something that
Would be deemed:
Odd
Weird
Inappropriate
For the

Other

To do,
As judged by
Our
Oppressors

In no time at all,
Rest assured,
When
Us

Others

Unite
We will make sure
You don't feel
The way we do

Othered

Work Acquaintances • David Haak

"Sick or Not-Sick?"
Our first task after leaving the classroom.
For me, like many,
death had existed only as absence.
Its pallid form
shallow breath
thready pulse
shrouded by hospitals
now familiar.
Ours is the burdened privilege
to recognize its face
to know and feel
that not one of us
simply vanishes back to atoms

**The Ineffable Housestaff Bond • Andrew
Yanik**

It starts as a forced collaboration
Teammates by assignment to care for the
ill
Sharing phone numbers and a small work
room space

It becomes an intimate relationship
Teammates driven by a passionate,
unified pursuit
Sharing vulnerabilities, laughter, and hugs

Grateful for a bond only this experience
could foster

The Next • Eric Sheffield

Disappointment overwhelms me as we
wheel her to the ICU
Second-guessing each decision we had
made

The ongoing search for the balance of
compassion without compromise

To be able to give one patient your all
without sacrificing the next

Because as you walk to the next patient's
room
They, too, deserve your best

More to Learn • Benjamin Gow-Lee

Black fingers match black toes
Pink bandages on biopsy sites.

"I hurt, Doc."

"I know, I know."

"What's wrong with me?"

"I wish I knew. We need another biopsy."

"Another?"

"Yes. Maybe we'll get some answers."

Later.

"Nope. No answers. I'm sorry."

I wish I knew how to help.

Why do I know so little?

Secondary Victims • Jessie Smith

No one talks about
the secondary trauma
of working in medicine,
living out worst nightmares,
day after day.

16 weeks pregnant,
Drops dead.
Presumed AFE.

Raped, miscarries.
Alone in the trauma bay.
A speculum exam
Traumatizes us both.

Walk back down the hall.
Plaster a smile to my face.
Don't think.
Don't process.
Just do.

**U Night Float: Senior Edition • Omar
Rachdi**

Another night, another >35 admissions

Let's get started.

Pager: Admit

Unstable patient

Pager: Admit

Rapid Response

Pager: Admit

Code blue

Pager: Admit

"Fuck you, Doc"

Pager: Admit

Nurse yelling

Pager: Admit

Patient yelling

Pager: Admit

Can I yell, too?

Pager: Admit

Need restroom

Pager: Admit

Troponin 27

Pager: Admit

Pager: Admit

The End: I'm crying

Moving dirt • Kristen Durbin

Two pairs of brown eyes glaze over as the
room fills with her empty advice, sighs,
and resigned recommendations.

“Think about therapy, okay?”

“Medication might help.”

“Everybody has dirt to move around -
sometimes we need help moving it.”

I stay, offering to turf teenage despair to
the clinic expert.

“Are they white or Navajo?”

Semantics • David Haak

I was once told
to be careful
with the words we choose.
“If diseases wage battles
and patients must fight,
we all, eventually, lose.”
But when a friend or a father die,
loss is what I felt.
The feeling was always more,

but never less.
I couldn't transfigure the pain
by naming it something else.

Life's Fragility • Andrew Yanik

Septic shock, stabilized.
Decompensates within hours. His wife
updated.
Decompensates further.

She arrives as fast as able; I tell her he will
not survive.
We hold hands across his body. He
passes.
As she cries, "I will never forget you,
thank you"

The fragility of life and the intimacies
we're fortunate to be entrusted with

It's just \$46,000 a year • John Gaumnitz

Back in the hospital; pain, bloody stools.
Report: "Inflammation throughout; scope unsafe to advance."
Desperately pushing steroids to ward off surgical management.

Medication list shows infliximab — last infusion one year prior.
It induced remission, but something changed.
Immune cascade again overflowing; colonic mucosa now eroding.

Drug failure?
No.
Health insurance lost, cost prohibitive.
System failure.

34 Minutes • Laura Fitzgerald

He decompensates at shift change;
The team is pulling out the epi drip.

"Please don't leave," his parents beg, in
Spanish,
"You're the only one we trust."

You promise, in Spanish, that you'll be
back tonight.
You promise he'll be in good hands.

When you return, the curtain is drawn.
You're 34 minutes too late.

52 Days • Omar Rachdi

Day 1: you are minimally conscious
Without coherent thought.
All you know is pain
The fall should have killed you

Day 28: you speak
"Thought time dilation would be
different"
UTI + TBI is not a good time

Day 37: our eyes meet,
You're taller than I realize

Day 52: you walk out
Without assistance

Vigil • Kat Amano

Sun-kissed freckles,
Stark against your pale face.
Lips
pressed against your mother's
masked cheek.

Too early for you
and
too late for me.
We sit silently,
Occupying the darkest
part of night.

This is how I remember you—
Saying
good-bye.

About the Authors

Kat Amano is a first-year Triple Board (pediatrics/psychiatry/child psychiatry) resident. The privilege of hearing and being briefly invited into her patients' stories has sustained her throughout her medical training.

Brenna Brown has been involved in the medical humanities since medical school, as an editor, researcher, and event organizer. She is currently a PGY2 in the University of Utah's adult psychiatry residency and finding creative reflection and writing helpful in better understanding the process of individuating as a physician.

Victoria Brown is an adult psychiatry resident Class of 2024. She is interested in the art of medicine and creative expression of illness, healing, and coping.

Liam Clark is a PGY5 who is a fellow in headache medicine. He values the humanistic aspects of medicine and fosters them whenever he can. He is appreciative to Rubor for being a consistent outlet throughout his training.

Kristen Durbin is a fourth-year Triple Board (pediatrics/adult psychiatry/child psychiatry) resident navigating her identities as a person and physician through writing and reflective practice.

Laura Fitzgerald is a third-year pediatric resident who is excited to continue calling Salt Lake City home after residency. She finds writing to be a challenging, therapeutic, and fulfilling exercise that she plans to continue for years to come.

John Gaumnitz is a second-year resident in Internal Medicine and an aspiring gastroenterologist. He is interested in exploring/highlighting the complex social factors associated with medication adherence in chronic diseases. He enjoys the simple pleasures of a warm blanket, a quiet morning with coffee, and the occasional golden weekend.

Benjamin Gow-Lee. "I am a second-year internal medicine resident from Washington State interested in humanism in medicine and global health. I'm grateful for all the patients and everyone else on the care team who help us learn."

David Haak is a third-year internal medicine resident who plans to be a hospitalist after completing a chief year. He enjoys writing as a novel way to explore the ways that patients and providers think, feel, and talk about healthcare.

Omar Rachdi is a second-year PM&R resident and enjoys writing in his free time. Omar describes himself as a 'goofball' and enjoys spending time with his wife, two cats, one pupper named Pumpkin, and our chickens.

Eric Sheffield is a second-year internal medicine resident who enjoys occasionally writing as a process to reflect on the human side of healthcare.

Jessie Smith is a second year OB-GYN resident who frequently has to function at the ends of the emotional spectrum. Writing provides time to pause and process these emotions, as well as find joy and meaning amidst the chaos.

Natalie Tedford, Pediatric Emergency Medicine & Global Health Fellow. "I enjoy providing care to underserved communities and being involved with education and community advocacy outreach. I hope to provide equitable healthcare and culturally sensitive interventions to help improve the health of communities." Personal hobbies: spending time with my partner (Tyler) and our Goldendoodle (Felix), trail running, cycling, cross-country skiing, swimming, reading, water-coloring, plant-based cooking, and relaxing.

Andrew Yanik, Internal Medicine Resident PGY2/MD. "I write yearly letters of gratitude to family and friends, with an attempt here to do the same with my work."