From "Fixing" to "Caring":
A Conversation about Medicine

MURPHY WALKER [MED 2]

After finishing my first year of medical school (at USask), I reached out to my long-time friend (now colleague), who also just finished his first year of medical school (at UBC).

I was curious; I had seen in his social media and in our conversations a definite change in his opinions. Whereas he had previously had a very precise outlook on things – wherein he generally saw things as black and white – he was now voicing much more socially oriented opinions. He was advocating for things like safe consumption sites and increased accessibility for people with disabilities in public services.

This is probably the most organized and hard-working person I have ever met, and I never had any reason to fault him. But still, something had changed; he seemed to be more socially conscious.

I reached out to him to ask him about these changes and to ask him whether or not his two-year Master of Public Health (MPH) had a role to play in these changes. Those two years seemed to correlate almost perfectly with his "before-and-after".

The following is a collation of our conversation:

Hey Lance! How are you doing? Have you started year 2 yet?

Hey man! Things are good! We start on August 31st!

Your fb feed is unreal.

Looks like you're really living your best life

haha thanks! been doing lots of hiking

That's awesome

hah. trying to, at least some moments. am not doing a lot inbetween those fun adventures though

You look pretty happy

i am 😊 things are good

That's good!

I always wondered how much your masters program chan free d your outlook on things - do you think it gave you important perspective before starting med school?

Absolutely. I think I would be a fundamentally different person if I had not done it.

In what ways, would you say?

If you don't mind my asking

which is wild to think, and maybe it's an exaggeration in that maybe I would have come to this point without the MPH, but I'm not sure I would have.

You're such a hardworking and intelligent dude, and you have some really great, well-backed perspectives on things. I think you would have gotten there without your MPH, but I think it certainly helped you along the way.

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It made me really think beyond the paradigms of knowledge / epistemologies that I was educated in, the positivist paradigms which say that knowledge is only valid if empirically verified by science, etc.

another big part is that it made me come to a different understanding of what health means, of how health is 'obtained', why health is obtained. I no longer saw health as the result of an individuals lifestyle, but the social conditions of their lives. I switch political leanings to be far more social policy-oriented.

I also began to think of humans more as relational beings, rather than individualistic beings. Seeing relationships and connections as what defines our lives, how humans are socially produced.

How, would you say, has your vision of your own future changed with these new interests and your increased criticism of these things you took for granted?

Do you have different goals, dreams, or expectations?

> How, would you say, has your vision of your own future changed with these new interests and your increased criticism of these...

Interesting question!

I think I see medicine now as more about caring for people, rather than 'fixing' or treating people. And in that respect, I see palliative care as something I am more interested in, because it's about just helping people live the best they can while they can, rather than treating people as a problem to be solved. Which is kinda how I used to think about medicine, the whole 'i like science and i like people and problem-solving'.

Do you have different goals, dreams, or expectations?

I used to be interested in politics more, and in issues like creating a hybrid private-public healthcare system in Canada, but now I realize that idea is just bad news. But those I think are smaller things.

I'm not sure dreams changed as much, but I think I have also come to appreciate the everyday moments in life more, but I don't think that's from my MPH, I think that's more just personal growth and maturity

I think I can see that reflected in your FB feed (as biased as that kind of thing can be).

But it reminded me of changes I've had - where exactly I'm worried less about working constantly towards a perfect life - and being grateful for each moment lived as something that will add richness and experience - good memories to look back on one day.

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Exactly. It's the moments of what I like to refer to as 'the interstitium of life'

The morning coffees, the book before bed, the laughs shared with friends, the drive on the way to school, trees turning red outside my window

As we were talking I thought your perspectives, especially as they relate to your master's of public health, are important and would be useful for pre-med students to see. Would you mind if I collated and edited this convo for that online pre-med community?

haha

the interstitium

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Yeah absolutely!

Personally, letting go of getting into medical school as a necessity, and being happy in the moment, was exactly what I needed to just relax and be my honest self in my interview.

Absolutely. I see too many med students who just think of medicine as 'problem-solving'

oh ●i gotta go now, picking up someone from the airport!! Will chat later.

bye!

I've kept this perspective in mind when I am shadowing on the wards. It is easy, to me, to go through things logically and come to the "right" answer for how each patient should be cared. But with this perspective in mind, I can better see that there is always another perspective.

Each individual is not only individual. While care should be planned with ethical principles like autonomy in mind, we have to keep in mind that we are relational beings.

There should be conversations around how care decisions affect friends and family. There should be conversations about not only the ultimate conclusion of our ethical axioms, but also softer, more emotional conversations that better reflect out human condition.