



## **Perspective / Opinion**

# **Memories**

By Linda Nwumeh

Every medical student remembers the day that they received acceptance to medical school—what they were doing, what time of day it was, who they told immediately. It is a memory that holds such salience that it is nearly impossible to forget. What I did not completely expect about medical school was that it was going to be *filled* with these kinds of memories. Numerous episodes that likely seemed mundane to my professors and physicians that I have shadowed have lodged themselves very firmly within my psyche.

For example, the first time I watched an endotracheal intubation, I was transfixed. The anesthesiologist used the laryngoscope to guide the tube into the patient's trachea and, just like that, the patient had a secure airway. It was amazing to me that such a critical procedure could be performed so quickly. I had watched unblinkingly, but to everyone else in the operating room, it was business as usual. The team quickly moved on to the next step in the procedure and I continued to watch with wide eyes.

It was the same when I watched my Clinical Apprenticeship preceptor use forceps to expertly retrieve a foreign body—the head of a Q-tip—from the external auditory canal of an unfortunate patient. It was a battle. The Q-tip's head could clearly be visualized right against the tympanic membrane, but numerous attempts to remove it resulted in the retrieval of small tufts of cotton. It expertly evaded capture until the very last tug, after which the patient was extremely grateful. To my preceptor, this was just another day of work at the Urgent Care, but for me, it was a shining example of how the education and skills I will accrue throughout this journey can be used to make someone's bad day a lot better. I will never forget that patient's gratitude.

These experiences, however, are not the only ones that have had a large impact on my first year. Perhaps, surprisingly, the ones that have been the most mundane may have also been the most encouraging. As a Black woman, I know that I am part of a group that is underrepresented in medicine. Patients know it too—I have seen the faces of black patients I see as part of my Clinical Apprenticeship light up after learning that I was a medical student. More than a few of them have earnestly congratulated me and wished me luck in my future studies. Knowing how important it is to have adequate representation in medicine and seeing patients who are

looking forward to a future that holds this makes me that much more excited to continue down this journey.

Because I know that I will not always be so wide-eyed, I have a lot of admiration for this stage. The novelty must wear off in order to make room for the exposure and repetition necessary to build expertise. But while it still lasts, I will continue to make room for all of these new experiences and memories that characterize the beginning of my medical career.

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