



Perspective/Opinion

Opening the Drawer

by Amy Domeyer-Klenske, MD

I have long been interested at the intersection of humanities and medicine and felt challenged in my efforts to braid them together. I recall my enthusiasm to become a Doctor/Writer when I was a medical student and had an opportunity to interact with physician authors at the [Examined Life Conference](#), held annually at University of Iowa. In one of these conversations, I was told I could put my writing interest in a metaphorical drawer during residency. I could allow myself to focus intensively on my training with the plan to re-open the drawer when I'd completed training. I left the conversation feeling a sense of freedom; I didn't feel guilt or pressure to be too many things at once. Instead of Doctor/Writer I could just be Doctor.

I proceeded throughout my training giving little thought to writing. I've since reflected on this advice and my decision to follow it. I'm certain that I write less now than I did as a student. I wonder if something was lost in the drawer, if recovering interests becomes more difficult the longer they are locked away.

I had the opportunity to share this advice and discuss strategies for remaining active in the humanities with Dr. Zack Schoppen, an OB/gyn resident, and a group of students during the M4 Humanities Elective on March 24, 2021. We discussed how the metaphorical drawer can be freeing when we are stressed. Alternatively, we discussed the option of planned engagement and disengagement where we use our time to actively check in on our humanities interests (writing a poem or an essay, reading a novel) but also allow ourselves time to actively "check out" (binge-watch television, nap, spend time with family

and friends). The second strategy allows ongoing engagement, but on our own terms.

This conversation refreshed me. I hope it did the same for our students. Inevitably, becoming a “good doctor” isn’t solely about how many articles you read or how much time you spend in the hospital. Engagement in the humanities can make us better doctors, active listeners and more resilient humans.

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