

A crossword puzzle may simply be described as a 15 by 15 grid with a few of the boxes shaded in and a series of clues matched to the corresponding interlocking words. However, a well-crafted crossword puzzle elevates the experience by weaving a web of clever wordplay and hidden themes which develop new aspects of the puzzle. I find the practice of medicine to be similar. A physician can meet the definition of a doctor by diagnosing a patient's ailments and prescribing the corresponding treatment. While these are not trivial facets of medicine, I believe that the patient experience is enriched when a clinician takes into account the full complexity of individuals beyond their physiologic problems. This includes striving to understand and influence health at the family and community level while filling unmet needs.

The pleasure found in solving the intricacies of crossword puzzles is similar to the increased sense of fulfillment I feel when struggling with the complexities of individuals. While working with a family physician, I presented a patient who had typical cold symptoms. Having seen almost a dozen patients with similar complaints I felt confident in my assessment and plan. I was surprised when the attending said that a key component was missing from my plan of fluids and rest. Using a Socratic style, he led me to understand that the patient knew that she would likely not be receiving a prescription for antibiotics when she arrived at the office. Instead she sought medical care because she had some anxiety about her condition and wanted to be sure that nothing more serious was occurring. We explained our thought process, the diagnosis, and expected course of the illness to the patient, which helped to relieve her anxiety and likely prevented her from returning to the clinic in the next couple of days with the same complaint. As a specialty, family medicine strongly values struggling to understand all of the concerns of a patient and not just focusing on the physiologic complaints.

Upon the completion of a crossword puzzle all the squares are nicely filled in, but the final challenge remains in figuring out the crossword's theme. Similarly, as clinicians we diagnose and treat individuals, but this is not complete. Individuals and their wellbeing are not isolated squares, but part of a network of families and communities, which also affect their health. This was demonstrated to me during one of my first clinical experiences while working with a pediatrician. I was impressed by how much time she spent discussing the mother's mood, social support, and health. After the visit, the physician explained that she put forth so much effort to evaluate and assist the patient's mother, because the mother's wellbeing would directly affect her child's health. She proudly stated that the time she spent counseling and encouraging young mothers resulted in several obtaining college degrees. This experience affirmed my belief that successful treatment and health promotion relied on the not only individuals, but also families and communities. One of the particular strengths of family physicians is their broad expertise, which optimally prepares them to engage families and communities.

The Saturday puzzle tends to be the most difficult one during the week. When I attempt it by myself almost all of the squares are left blank. However with the help of my wife and other friends we are able to make more progress and sometimes even complete the puzzle. Similarly in healthcare there are many problems left to be solved and unmet needs. My experience has shown me that with the support of others I am able to successfully face these challenges. During my undergraduate experience, I learned about the high rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in the surrounding community. I wanted to help address these problems and so I sought out the coordinator of a family planning clinic to discuss existing community resources and possible solutions. I found that all the existing educational programs in the area focused on conveying information to teenagers. However, from my literature search, I knew that parents have a large influence on their children's knowledge and behavior. Therefore, with the

guidance of the clinic coordinator, I created a health education session aimed at addressing the barriers that parents faced in talking with their children about sex. Since my cultural background was different from the community I was working in, I met with local religious leaders to design a program that would allow parents to approach the topic in a way that was educational while preserving their religious values. When I presented the program to a church group, the parents felt more empowered to approach the topic of sex with their children.

Every day the newspaper prints another crossword puzzle: another chance for me to struggle with blank boxes and wordplay. Every day a family physician's office is visited by more patients: another opportunity to strive to deeply understand patients and all the factors which affect their health. I look forward to being able to see the problems of individuals in a clinical setting and to then work with families and communities to address the larger issues related to their health.