2022-2023 Golden Stethoscope Nomination

Nominated for: Outstanding DOCS Preceptor

Name of Nominee Dr. Samuel Porter

"Clearly the task of the doctor — unless he merely accepts the illness on its face value and incidentally guarantees for himself a 'difficult' patient — is to recognize the man."
-John Berger, A Fortunate Mate: The Story of a Country Doctor

Before my first session with Dr. Porter, he sent me a John Berger passage that included the above quote. I did not know this at the time, but I was about to witness doctoring that attempted to encompass the range of human experiences. At our meeting, we discussed this passage, the first of several "Moments for the Humanities" as Dr. Porter calls them.

The first lesson he taught me, and perhaps the most important, is to always know what your patient does for work. As a first year medical student it can feel overwhelming to pivot to the patient's personal life amidst a conversation about symptoms and bodily functions. Dr. Porter never failed to connect with his patients on a more-than-superficial level. One moment that stands out to me is when I interviewed a patient who was actively incarcerated. I remember feeling nervous and unsure of how to navigate the presence of a security officer and how to gather the patient's social history. When Dr. Porter came to check on our interview, he and the patient immediately erupted into conversation about baseball. He then seamlessly transitioned into a conversation about whether to continue the patient's hydromorphone. Instead of making a unilateral decision about the care plan, he worked with the patient to develop one that made them both comfortable.

This is not to say that Dr. Porter never ran into any difficulties with patients. In another example, he and a patient had a disagreement about whether or not to continue care. From Dr. Porter's perspective, the patient was able to return home. The patient, feeling anxious about this decision, started to shut down. Dr. Porter brought himself to her physical level and asked her about her feelings. He tried to engage her in conversation, but when it was clear that she did not want to engage, he stepped out of the room to phone another physician that the patient trusted. He then debriefed the patient encounter with me, because it can be challenging to see a physician upset their patient.

When I provided feedback to Dr. Porter that I would like to have more observed experiences with patients, we scheduled sessions on his days off. He came to the hospital to select patients for me to interview and took detailed notes on my skills. I received thoughtful, constructive feedback, and I always left our sessions feeling energized. He challenged my clinical reasoning skills and contributed to my curiosity. Dr. Porter made the hospital an inviting place where medical students can learn from and form friendships with physicians. He is an exemplary preceptor and outstanding role model. I am excited for the experiences of his future students.

Written by: Melanie Mandell