



Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal

Melody of Empathy: Harmonizing Narratives in the World of Healing

Amber Nelson

In the initial chapters of my premedical journey, I decided to participate in a study abroad program centered on social justice. While I felt familiar with the idea of social justice within my own community, I found myself lacking any concept of social justice outside of my small world view. As a result, I found myself immersed in the vibrant palette of India – a vast canvas painted with diverse cultures, beliefs, and stories. As a budding premedical student, the fabric of awareness unfolded before me, revealing the profound importance of nurturing cultural insight and self-awareness to synchronize equitable care for the various voices seeking solace within the realms of medicine.

India, with its myriad traditions, became my educational stage, imparting lessons that transcended the confines of textbooks. In the sacred city of Varanasi, where the Ganges whispered ancient tales, I observed the intricate dance of life and death in Hindu rituals. The Kapoor family, in their

raw vulnerability during the cremation ceremony, shared not just their grief but a cultural narrative distinct from my own. It was a symphony of beliefs, a poignant reminder that offering compassionate care demanded more than clinical knowledge; it required an immersion into the cultural intricacies shaping each student's journey.

As I navigated the corridors of premedical education, self-awareness emerged as my guiding lantern. India's teachings resonated within me, urging me to acknowledge the shadows of bias that might cloud my understanding. To heal is to dance in synchrony with diverse narratives, and being attuned to my own cultural melodies allows me to navigate this delicate waltz with humility and openness.

End-of-life care, resembling a soulful melody, demands an understanding of the cultural notes composing each student's unique symphony. In Hindu culture, death is not merely a cessation but a transition, a journey towards liberation. Cultural competence becomes the poetic verses bridging the gap between student and practitioner. Each student, a stanza with its

unique cadence, requires a tailored approach rooted in the soil of their cultural identity.

Picture the scene – the flickering flames, the fragrance of incense, the river's gentle whispers carrying prayers. In the cultural theater of Varanasi, the significance of cultural competence unfolded like a poignant drama. It was not just about knowing customs; it was about feeling the pulse of a family bidding farewell to a loved one. It was about recognizing that the rituals were not mere traditions; they were the threads weaving the fabric of solace for the grieving.

Reflecting now as a first-year medical student, I recognize that my younger premedical self was beginning to grasp the essence of cultural competence. It was not a checklist to be marked off; it was an immersive experience, an ongoing journey of understanding and appreciating the diverse narratives within the realm of healthcare.

Equitable care, then, transforms into a compelling narrative where every person's story is heard, understood, and respected. Envisioning my role in this narrative, I see myself as a storyteller, translating medical knowledge into a language that resonates with the diverse melodies of humanity. It is not just

about treating ailments; it is about fostering an environment where individuals feel seen, heard, and valued in the rich tapestry of their cultural identity.

In the dynamic marketplace of healthcare, cultural competence becomes a currency that transcends borders. It is an investment in building bridges of understanding, dismantling barriers that might hinder effective communication and compassionate care. As a first-year medical student, I stand at the threshold of this transformative journey, armed not only with textbooks but with the cultural insights that India has etched into my soul.

As the initial chapters of my medical school journey unfold, I carry with me the lessons of India – a reminder that cultural competence is not an accessory but the heartstrings that resonate with the heartbeat of humanity. With each encounter, I strive to compose a melody of care that transcends cultural boundaries, embracing the rich diversity that makes the tapestry of medicine a masterpiece in the making.

Biography



A current first-year medical student at Indiana University, Amber Nelson holds a bachelor's degree in biology with minors in Chemistry and Psychology from Indiana University. Joining the American Medical Women's

Association (AMWA) in 2023, she is committed to promoting gender equality in medicine. With a passion for mentoring, she seeks to guide future medical professionals. Her focus extends to addressing racial disparities in healthcare and advocating for LGBTQ+ competent care. Grounded in a multidisciplinary approach, she navigates the complexities of medical education with resilience and dedication. As a nontraditional student balancing the demands of medical school while juggling the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood, she navigates the complexities of academia with unwavering determination and a commitment to maintaining a harmonious family life. As she progresses, her goal is to contribute to positive change in healthcare, emphasizing inclusivity and systemic equity.