



Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal

The Hyphen

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Part 1

“Ap kaise ho?”

Begrudgingly, I responded to the Urdu question of ‘how are you’ to my mom, annoyingly correcting my pronunciation. Navigating my connection to Urdu felt like a forceful one, like a tag attached to me that I couldn’t quite understand. In my own journey, reluctantly responding to my mother’s Urdu inquiry about my well-being underscored the complex relationship I had with my cultural heritage. Despite being born in the United States, I recognized the significance of bridging linguistic barriers to engage with my South Asian community authentically when I visited Pakistan for the first time.

Hing, haldi, and honey.

Golden turmeric powder coats the honey swirling with the clay colored *hing* spice in warm water. That’s how each morning in Pakistan would begin. My project in Pakistan at the Sultanabad Colony School began with the stark realization that pads and

filtered water, what I once thought were basic supplies, were actually luxurious commodities. My team and I set up sustainable hand sanitizer stations and spoke to students about hygiene and menstrual health, eventually inviting the students and their parents to learn about this hygiene initiative. Unsure whether I’d be accepted as a Westerner coming into Karachi, my palms began to sweat, as parents approached the stations we’d set up during our presentation. I cringed as I began to explain hygiene in halting Urdu, feeling the distance between my family’s “culture” and my “home” more than ever. Amongst the parents in front of me, I could suddenly make out nodding heads and smiling young mothers. In a language foreign to me, I was able to impact the health decisions of two students, Zahra, and Asna, who approached me after to ask about pads and bodily hygiene. Urdu had opened up a microcosm of trust, a dilution of tension between three global citizens.

Upon my return from Pakistan, I realized that period poverty and menstrual stigma wasn’t solely a developing world problem. In college, I founded Athena Labs, a

student-run organization at my university dedicated to advancing scientific research on women's well-being, particularly by educating my peers about menstrual poverty globally. Recognizing the global issue of period poverty, we embarked on a mission to drive awareness and understanding of this pressing issue, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers by creating a pad drive for homeless shelters in our area, and presenting policy recommendations at a women's conference in Virginia that year.

Through these experiences, I've learned that language alone is insufficient in building lasting trust in healthcare. Culturally sensitive interactions, rooted in humility and understanding, are essential in fostering genuine relationships with diverse patient populations. My dedication to Urdu serves as a testament to my commitment to inspire cultural competence in my peers, advocating for the celebration of individuals' unique stories and backgrounds in healthcare.

My journey in Pakistan was a profound immersion into a culture rich with history, traditions, and challenges. Sultanabad Colony School became a microcosm of the broader societal issues plaguing many communities in Pakistan. The lack of access to basic hygiene supplies highlighted systemic inequalities that AMWA's Linda Brodsky Memorial Journal | Vol 9 | No 1 | 2024

perpetuated health disparities. Despite my initial discomfort with my limited Urdu proficiency, I realized that genuine empathy and effort transcended language barriers. My interactions with Zahra and Asna epitomized the transformative power of authentic communication. Their curiosity and receptiveness underscored the importance of meeting patients where they are, both linguistically and culturally.

Returning to my local religious community back home, the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated preexisting disparities, particularly among vulnerable populations. Noticing the need for masks in my Jamatkhana (place of worship) allowed me to form a women's cooperative of talented seamstresses who began designing masks for our local Carrollton community during the shortage. Through [collaborative efforts and culturally sensitive engagement](#), we were able to effect tangible change while fostering a sense of community and belonging, even if that communication was primarily through my broken Urdu.

From Pakistan to Athena Labs to COVID, I sought to address pressing issues affecting women's well-being on a global scale, despite various social and cultural differences. Period poverty emerged as a focal point, highlighting the multifaceted nature of inequities in access to healthcare resources.

Our commitment to cultural competence guided our approach, ensuring that our initiatives were inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of communities worldwide. Dr. Brodsky's ethos of embracing sensitivity and complexity resonated deeply with our mission, inspiring us to confront uncomfortable truths and drive meaningful change.

Looking ahead, I am committed to continuing my journey towards cultural competence and self-awareness in healthcare. The lessons learned from Dr. Brodsky's example and my own experiences underscore the imperative of humility, empathy, and [inclusivity in patient care](#). As I navigate the complexities of healthcare delivery, I am reminded of the transformative potential of authentic engagement and cross-cultural communication. Through ongoing reflection, education, and advocacy, I aspire to cultivate environments of trust, respect, and dignity for all patients, irrespective of their backgrounds or identities.

In conclusion, the journey towards cultural competence and self-awareness in healthcare is a multifaceted and ongoing process. Dr. Brodsky's legacy serves as a guiding light, illuminating the importance of empathy, humility, and inclusivity in patient care. My experiences in Pakistan and within my local community have reinforced the

transformative power of language and cultural sensitivity in fostering trust, understanding, and empowerment. As I continue to navigate the complexities of healthcare delivery, I am committed to fostering genuine relationships, advocating for equitable access to care, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, especially through my TEDx talk. Today, I work with various government officials in Texas to recognize healthcare gaps and work to build communities around a particular cause. Through these efforts, I hope to honor Dr. Brodsky's legacy and inspire others to embrace cultural competence as a cornerstone of compassionate and effective healthcare practice

Part 2

During my medical education, "High Performance Habits" by Brendon Burchard emerged as a transformative guide that significantly influenced not only my perspective on healthcare, but also my decision to pursue a career in this field. While Burchard's book may not be a conventional medical school textbook, its principles proved to be universally relevant, transcending professions and offering profound insights into personal and professional development.

One of the most striking impacts of "High Performance Habits" on my journey into healthcare was its emphasis on clarity. In

medicine, clarity is not merely about understanding complex medical concepts; it encompasses a deeper clarity of purpose, values, and goals. Throughout the rigors of medical school, amidst the flood of information and demanding clinical rotations, it's easy to lose sight of the initial motivations that led me into this profession. Burchard's book served as a beacon, reminding me to continually reassess and reaffirm my commitment to healthcare, ensuring that every action I take aligns with my core values and long-term aspirations in the field. This clarity has been instrumental in guiding me through the myriad decisions and challenges encountered on the path to becoming a healthcare professional.

Moreover, Burchard's insights into generating and sustaining high levels of energy resonated deeply with the demanding nature of medical education and practice. The journey through medical school is physically and mentally taxing, requiring not only intellectual acumen but also resilience and stamina. Recognizing the direct correlation between energy levels and performance, I integrated Burchard's strategies for self-care and energy management into my routine. Prioritizing activities such as regular exercise, mindfulness practices, and adequate rest became essential components of my daily

life, not only enhancing my personal well-being but also fortifying my capacity to provide compassionate and effective care to patients.

Additionally, the book's discussions on productivity and influence proved invaluable in navigating the complexities of medical training and the professional landscape of healthcare. Efficient time management, effective communication, and the ability to foster collaborative relationships are fundamental skills for success in medicine. Burchard's principles for maximizing productivity and building influence served as guiding principles in my approach to academic pursuits, clinical responsibilities, and interactions with colleagues and patients alike. By implementing strategies outlined in the book, I was able to optimize my workflow, enhance teamwork dynamics, and cultivate meaningful connections within the healthcare community, thereby facilitating both personal growth and professional advancement.

Perhaps one of the most profound impacts of "High Performance Habits" was its emphasis on continuous growth and learning—a cornerstone of the medical profession. Medicine is a field characterized by lifelong learning, where staying abreast of advancements, refining skills, and adapting to new challenges are essential for providing optimal patient care. Burchard's framework of

embracing challenges, seeking feedback, and maintaining a growth mindset resonated deeply with the ethos of medical education and practice. It reinforced the notion that setbacks and failures are not obstacles but opportunities for learning and refinement, inspiring me to approach each clinical encounter and professional endeavor with a spirit of curiosity and resilience.

Furthermore, "High Performance Habits" underscored the importance of fostering meaningful relationships and giving back—values that lie at the heart of healthcare. Effective collaboration, empathy, and altruism are foundational to the practice of medicine, shaping not only individual patient outcomes but also the broader health of communities. Burchard's emphasis on contribution and service inspired me to seek out opportunities for mentorship, advocacy, and community engagement within the medical field, reinforcing my commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of others through my work; this is when I decided to be a pre-medical youth mentor and dedicate my summers abroad to mentor the youth, as well as volunteer at Agape Dermatology, the student-run free clinic on campus.

In summary, "High Performance Habits" profoundly influenced my decision to pursue a career in healthcare by providing

a comprehensive framework for personal and professional development that transcends the boundaries of any specific profession. Its principles of clarity, energy, productivity, growth, and giving have not only shaped my journey through medical education and practice but also reaffirmed my dedication to serving others through the healing arts.

In addition to the principles outlined in "High Performance Habits," my journey into healthcare has been enriched by diverse experiences, including my involvement in dermatology research. As a medical student, I had the opportunity to participate in research projects focused on dermatological conditions, exploring novel treatment modalities, and contributing to the advancement of medical knowledge in this field, especially in relation to dermatomyositis. Engaging in research not only honed my critical thinking and analytical skills but also deepened my understanding of the pathophysiology and management of dermatological disorders. Moreover, it provided me with invaluable opportunities to collaborate with experts in the field, further expanding my professional network and fostering mentorship relationships that continue to guide my academic and career pursuits in dermatology.

In conclusion, my journey into healthcare has been shaped by a myriad of

influences, including the principles espoused in "High Performance Habits," my involvement in dermatology research, and my engagement with platforms such as TED Talks. These experiences have not only deepened my understanding of the medical profession but also reinforced my commitment to excellence, continuous learning, and compassionate care. As I continue on this journey, I am grateful for the diverse opportunities that have contributed to my growth and development as a healthcare professional, and I am excited to further explore the intersections of medicine, research, and innovation in pursuit of improved patient outcomes and societal well-being.

Biography



My name is Sofia Babool and I'm an American-Pakistani Muslim medical student at UT Southwestern Medical Center. My passion for healthcare runs deep, specifically in the fields of dermatology and oncology research. In addition, I enjoy public speaking which enabled me to give two TEDx talks on my global trips abroad for youth mentorship camps. Thank you for taking the time to read this.