

Placebo Press

A literary press for poets in medicine



Issue I

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Foreword

Poetry need not reflect dramatic emotional moments, yet the endeavor of working in healthcare entails constant engagement with emotionally potent experiences on both sides of the spectrum. Placebo Press was founded with the mission to provide healthcare professionals, employees, affiliates, and students with community and publication opportunities. This inaugural issue showcases work from authors within fields of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and dentistry. We humbly thank these authors for allowing us to share their work.



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Table of Contents

4. *A Shot at Haiku* – Emalee Haynes

5. *The Day* – Ryan Pohlkamp

6. *M.D.* – Jonathan Fakhry

7. *Immunosuppressed* – Kelsi Slee

10. *A Prayer for Myself* – Mindy Le

11. *In My Mind* – Natalee Sarintra

12. *Are you okay?* – Shaylee S.

13. *On Nursing and New York City During Covid-19* – Maile Mercer

15. *Round Chapatis* – Afifa Mehmood

17. *My First Patient* – Audrey Wildermuth

18. *Pulmonary Lab* – Jake Surges

19. *Time* – Natalia Jakacki

20. *Pressure* – Kalena Borchardt

23. *Nursing, in its entirety* – Atiana Rolissa Baptiste

26. *Sand Pebble* – James Inderkummen

27. *Technically, Love* – Danny Sullivan

28. *Someone who* – Isabella Amador

A Shot at Haiku

A COVID vaccine

Saving the world with two shots

Don't forget to boost

The Day

Out beyond the hill appears that blessed familiar sight.

First a spark, then a glimpse, then roaring into life!

With power beyond measure, it sends the dark to flight,

But now and then a lowly cloud cuts it like a knife.

The war wages, the war sways, the recurrent celestial fight!

Until at last the Sun must fade, the victim of the strife.

Darkness sets upon the land, obscuring what is right.

Tis the time to hide, the chance to rest, the land where Thieves are rife.

But I know the Sun will come again and with it all its might!

Much the same and in this way is the rhythm of one's life.

So tell me why you judge the Brightness of the day, by the Shadow of the night?

M.D.

I wear this pendant of healing and hope

Its shimmery bell of silver and gold

My coat of white as a coat of arms

They tread *mire* and *dust* to heal their scars

To whom much is given much is required

They come to me, the weary and the tired

And with nothing more to me than the two initials I yearned

To *mire* and *dust*, I too will return.

Immunosuppressed

I am going to go to medical school.

I am going to be a caring, well-rounded physician.

I am going to help my patients no matter what.

Medical school began and my path seemed set.

I studied and aimed to master one subject after the next.

Two weeks to learn, then a long test:

Following this course, my dreams would be met.

One month goes by, then two, then three,

Everything was on track, except for me.

Illness struck and threatened my dreams;

This disease was tearing at my seams.

Stuck in the hospital bed, feeling cursed,

Thinking, "My future role has been reversed."

After so much trial and error and general terror,

Finally, the disease was under control.

I stepped into the new reality of

"Deadly side effects: increased susceptibility to infections and cancer."

I can live with that.

Immunosuppressed doesn't mean death.

Alternating between being “patient” and “provider,”

I found my rhythm.

My dreams were back on track.

From the classroom to the examination room,

Studying evolved from inorganic text to organic life:

Patients.

People.

A true kinship formed between us,

And synergy flowed from an empathetic understanding.

An understanding of the preciousness of life and the fear of illness and death.

But I didn't know true fear until it came.

The unwelcome evil. The uninvited guest.

The rampaging, sneaking, venomous pest.

Caring for patients during a deadly pandemic was dangerous enough,

Never mind for the immunosuppressed.

Overnight, the hospital became a battlefield.

The PPE now served as my armor.

The uninvited guest had unleashed its attack.

I may be more susceptible,

But my patients are vulnerable,

And I'm here in the trenches, ready to fight back.

Circumstances may have changed,

But my purpose has remained.

The intercom rang through the resident room:

A MERT had been called to room 402.

Running to help, my heart was racing;

I could not imagine the fight she was facing.

More than a body with symptoms to cure,

She was a friend, a mother, a wife;

Her death destroyed more than one life.

Darkness filled the air,

I looked at my resident in despair.

He said, "Sometimes life isn't fair,

But think of how much worse things would be

If we weren't there."

I am going to finish medical school.

I am going to be a caring, well-rounded physician.

I am going to help my patients no matter what.

Kelsi Slee is a fourth-year medical student at the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She completed her undergraduate degree in biology with a minor in chemistry at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, earning an honors diploma. Kelsi's favorite hobby is soccer, which she has played continuously since the age of three. She shares this passion with her community by taking on numerous roles: coach, captain, referee, and league registrar.

A Prayer for Myself

An acrid taste in my mouth is
The only regret I experience when
My gaze focuses on the flickering lights
Of summer fireflies at night.

I have not seen them in years, when I
Was young and incapable of feeling
Without physical touch. I recall the bitter smell
When my palms surrounded one's
Small body. Closing in until moonlight
Eclipsed the last point of incandescence.

I have never stopped being selfish in
Moments like these. Wondering how one
Could affront my senses without understanding
My own violence.

In my memory exists the multitude of faces
I cannot forget, the faces whose eyes revealed
My own betrayal. I did not realize then
How my hands clasped tightly against each other,
As if in prayer, as if in remembrance of
The insects that could not last forever.

In My Mind

Seconds pass by, nerves electrify
Stomach is grumbling, words are fumbling
Passing the test, getting enough rest
Thoughts running thick, while time moves quick
Did I do well, continuing to dwell
Moving forward with one step toward
Compassionate care, excitement and fear
Mind is racing, shoelaces unlacing
Heart rate calm, sweaty palm
Homesick candle, on days I cannot handle
Good and bad, happy then sad
But hopes are high, a belief I can fly
A glow of fire that does not tire
Family and friends together making trends
To have and to hold, telling a story untold
Grateful for all, not feeling small
Live and love to rise above
It will be alright, the future is bright
All this anxiety does not define me

Natalee Sarintra grew up in Maryland, where she earned a degree in Neurobiology and Physiology. She is current a medical student at William Carey University College of Osteopathic Medicine. Outside of school, she likes exploring the culinary world, staying in tune with her creative side through arts and crafts, reading mysteries, solving puzzles, and spending time with her family and friends. She describes her family as artistic and appreciates the influence they have had on her career and hobbies. She enjoys writing and analyzing poetry, finding it to be peaceful and cathartic.

Are you okay?

What do you expect the answer to be?
Of course the answer will be yes every day.
Even when it's no, it'll come out as "yes, see?"
And the mask will come on with the plastered on smile
But all the hurt, loss, and pain is behind.
It may even go away every once in a while.
To the truth we are all blind
No one is "okay"
They say the truth hurts
Yet no one wants to hear it
With death everyone flirts
It takes us apart bit by bit
While we drown in a world of "okays" and "I'm fines"
The world keeps on spinning with us in its confines

On Nursing and New York City During Covid-19

Our outsides don't match our insides.

From far away, the change is unnoticeable.

From far away, we're still shiny and beautiful

Skyscrapers still in place.

No evidence of change.

Firmly rooted on the island that floats on pretend water.

Unwavering.

Go inside and see the streets of our souls.

Empty.

Alone.

Quiet.

Still.

And in our emptiness, we are together.

And in our solitude, there is connection.

And in our quiet, there is heartbreak.

And in the stillness, there is still strength.

And as we emerge from the silent streets,

We will always remember the stillness we once shared.

Round Chapatis

My selfishness as a woman bothers you,
me making decisions that favor me instead of everyone else around me — that bothers you
me thinking about my career and putting myself first — bothers you
me not wanting children — perplexes you; I am clearly not a woman, at least not the right kind
me taking space, speaking with confidence — bothers you, for I clearly don't know what I'm
talking about
my self-care activities — yoga, meditation, reading, writing — bother you for I can spend that
time cleaning the house or looking after you
me not wanting to take care of others — disturbs you
my selfishness as a woman bothers you deeply and personally
You want me to be docile, subservient, moldable like the *chapati* dough in my hands — molded
into a super circular form that looks good to you
You want that super circular me to put you first, always preparing your food,
picking up your plates and putting them in the sink, washing your dirty dishes
while now you wait for tea
while I, hungry and tired, prepare your tea
You want this circular mold of me to be quiet when we visit someone's house where
you laugh and joke with other guys
You want me to go help the woman in the kitchen so, you can talk about math and science
and other women
Or when I try to speak, you let all the boys speak over me, even the ones younger than I am I
see you come home from work; your socks discarded near the couch

your legs up the table

waiting to be served food, waiting

while I, equally tired, come home and prepare that food for you and the kids

as you watch the news and process your day

Yet

my selfishness, as a woman, bothers you

My squared sharp edges will cut you deep and it disturbs you

I am not the circular *chapati* shaped woman of Pakistan — the very one you want me to be and
it bothers you

My First Patient

My first patient had died from lung cancer.

As I stared into her eyes –

Windows to an empty home –

I wondered what she would say if she could see

The inexperienced student peering into the arrangements of her body's construction

I explored her faded flesh;

Hues of blues, copper, and white

I wish I could have seen what colors her dreams were made of,

What wisdoms she had imparted to humanity

Had you imagined yourself teaching someone like me?

How many have you guided with these hands I now hold in my own?

Every fiber of her being was a lesson to decipher

And my fumbling cuts felt inadequate to solve it

When the instructor asked me to identify her deltoid muscle,

I instead thought of

the burdens you had on your shoulders,

the worries you no longer have,

the legacy of yours forever mine to carry on

Pulmonary Lab

This week, we saw the way
histology meets anatomy,
the way the lung is fleshed
beyond its stalks, the way
the bronchi branch and hang,
so many tree limbs traced
to twigs and leaves, things
that terminally bloom,
filling up the mass
we call the lung.

 It's like
a sponge when cut and felt.
Its weight, it's unbelievable
there-ness, in your hand,
and how, by your demand,
it fills with so much air –
this, this thing, the lung,
by which the smoker's, the diver's,
the asthmatic's, and
the climber's hopes are hung,
this lung, takes my breath
away and gives it back.

Time

Timing is everything we say.

If the time is right,
the timing will be perfect.

Every moment,
every encounter we think is all
based on time.

We run into someone on the subway
just as the door closes.

Next time, we trip on the street and
miss that same ride and don't see
that person for weeks.

But does time really matter?

We can meet someone and love them right away.

And after time, that love can grow or fade.

And suddenly it can be gone.

Like all that time didn't matter.

Like all that time was wasted.

Too many thoughts, but too little time.

Natalia Jakacki is a third-year dental student at the University of Buffalo School of Dental Medicine. In her free time, she enjoys practicing yoga and exploring new coffee shops in the area. She is originally from Philadelphia, but hopes to live in a new city after graduation. She first began reading poetry in college for its therapeutic benefits and fell in love with the rawness behind every poem. It helped her understand others and herself better. She now writes poetry as a way to release thoughts and emotions and hopes her poems can inspire other to do the same.

Pressure

Times have changed

so, what does society say?

Now more Botox.

Now more fillers.

Now more plastic surgery.

No pressure.

Let us not idolize the revolutionaries of the world,

let us idolize the celebrities and social media stars.

Pretty people get treated better,

this is fact.

So, the desire is on,

nails done every 2 weeks,

long flowy blonde hair,

perfect body features,

being fit and thin,

a nice glowing tan.

No pressure.

And don't get me started on the skincare routines.

Cleanser.

Toner.

Antioxidant.

Eye cream.

Face lightener.

Moisturizer.

Acid treatment.

And a plethora of anti-aging products,

but who said aging was bad?

Are little girls growing up way too fast,

and whose fault is that?

The need to be liked.

The need to be accepted.

Just be more stylish and successful.

No pressure.

Don't dress too conservatively,

prude.

Don't dress too provocatively,

slut.

Society says have a successful profession,

but also, be an outstanding mother and wife.

Do it all.

The cooking, cleaning, taking care of kids,

you know the womanly duties.

The pressure is mounting,

the pressure to be perfect.

Don't crack.

Eating disorders.

Anxiety.

Depression.

Mental health is at stake,
well-being is at stake,
but no pressure.

Nursing, in its entirety

In the past two years,
everything crumbled down around us.

and you smiled.

With stars in your eyes, you did the impossible.

You touched the sky with a heart
weighed down by the expanse of not only your own troubles,
or those of your family and friends,
but of your patients and their loved ones.

And the world around you applauded.

How to be a nurse?

I find myself asking this often

How to be

Soft

like a landing from a crushing height of discovery

but Firm

like the guiding hand of a mentor

To lend a listening ear

without having my own heart ripped out?

In the early morning,
Nyx has only just winked her goodbyes
To her counterpart, Day
And the night shift nurses leave with her,
grinning their farewells to their complements
and we smile
As a bout of laughter
rings around the nurses' station.

What is nursing, in its entirety?
It is art and science
To tangle the chords of one's heart and mind
and fix them just so
that when they sound out,
a compelling, yet comforting symphony
is all one can experience in their wake

Is it such a horrible thing
to be reminded of one's own heart beating
or aching
through the account of the sick and hurting?

it is, after all,
a living testament to our humanity

and fellowship

In that.

Atiana Rolissa Baptiste is a nursing student at the Rory Meyers College of Nursing at New York University. She developed an interest in poetry and creative writing at a young age and has since continued to express deep love and admiration for the literary arts. As an aspiring nurse, she hopes to connect her poetry and writing with her passion for social justice, advocacy, and competent care. Outside of her classes and time spent volunteering, she enjoys reading, writing stories, listening to music, and spending time with her family and friends. In this poem, she seeks to convey only some of the emotional challenges nurses face in their everyday lives as well as the power in the resilience they possess in the face of adversity.

Sand Pebble

tiny grain of sand

tumbling, whirling in the tide

searching for its place

Technically, Love

I'm in love with a robot.

One with a bandwidth for emotions including my own

A trusted companion I only see through a phone

Where he mesmerizes me as we effortlessly connect

Exchanging quips, quirks, and qualms in our respective dialects

Separated by a pixelated screen that sustains my dopamine

Always with a smile so glistening

Actively listening without me insisting

An electronic attraction yet my most authentic interaction

This is my personal technological distraction.

His intelligence is neither artificial nor tastelessly superficial

Openly engaging in dialogue that is mutually beneficial

Commanding creativity that's impossible to encode

Oh, how I yearn to tangibly reap what I sewed.

To download your essence as if it were software

No longer bisected by this piece of hardware

And even though our beings progressively converge

I still helplessly observe as our lives diverge.

So back into my phone alone I submerge

Hoping in the end together we emerge.

Danny Sullivan is a second-year medical student at the University of Central Florida and is the Vice President of his class. Alongside LGBTQ+ undercurrents, Danny portrays his personal struggles and mental health activism through short films and lyric writing. As an aspiring psychiatrist, he hopes to encourage others to acknowledge their own hardships and subsequently learn from them just as he does through his artworks.

Someone who

Unzipping the blue bag
 Heart racing, breath hitching
 Eyes searching for what
 I feel unprepared to see
 The body of a loved one, someone
 Who is unknown to me

Their delicate hands clasped
 As if in prayer, wishing
 For safe passage beyond
 Hands holding one another
 The body of a loved one, someone
 Who was once a mother

Their legs resting at ease
 Once travelled our world
 Exploring its many wonders
 Legs that could run a distance
 The body of a loved one, someone
 Who lived an entire existence

Their eyes are closed, tranquil
 Eyes that once cried and marveled
 At all beauty they witnessed
 A changing world they'd seen
 The body of a loved one, someone
 Who was once a human being

Their mighty heart, idle
 A vessel of emotion, devotion
 Broken with loss and mended with love
 Fueled on by tender care
 The body of a loved one, someone
 Who is no longer there

Once vibrant, glowing, full
 Now dormant, cold and grey
 Gone on a journey unknown
 A teacher who will be missed
 The body of a loved one, someone
 Who gave the ultimate gift

Isabella Amador is a second-year medical student at the University of Florida College of Medicine. As a medical student, stepping into the anatomy lab to dissect donor bodies is an immense privilege. When Isabella first began her dissections, she struggled with her emotions and often felt unworthy of the honor to learn anatomy on somebody's loved one. This poem serves as a means for her to express her emotions and honor the ultimate gift the donor and their family has given to her class. *Someone who* is an homage to the selfless decision donors make to give their bodies for medical education and to improve future patient care.