



Thursday Memo – February 5, 2015

First Home Visit - by Jessica Boatman

My first home visit. Stopping in to grab the home visit bag at Hahnemann before I left, I paused for a minute. Our home visit bag is a link to the past, even though with its bulky shape and wheels it doesn't feel anything like the home visit bags of a previous generation. Picking up the bag, heavy with an exam-room's worth of supplies, I paused momentarily to think about this privilege. Here I was, marking another rite of passage, joining the ranks of physicians who have been seeing patients in their homes for generations. After working hard throughout medical school to become a Family Medicine physician, a patient was about to welcome me into his home in order to treat not only his symptoms but get to know him better as a person.

Entering his apartment, I was struck by just how much it felt like a home. My patient fit perfectly in this environment; slightly disheveled and cluttered, but generally clean and cozy. Certain aspects of his life were immediately visible - especially his hobby of collecting movies and music. His pride in his collection was apparent, and he gave me a complete tour of his home with its stacks and stacks of movies. I noticed immediately how much more comfortable he seemed here. I noticed, too, how easy it was to talk about the non-medical factors of his life which contribute to his health. It was easier to ask questions about family, community, and supports; and about food and food security, and life stressors. Sitting around his kitchen table with him and his wife, it was even easier to have a discussion about goals of care.

Being in his home, I took pride in belonging to a specialty that values home visits and these discussions about determinants of health. The home visit really felt like it leveled the playing field between us. In the office, as much as we try to avoid it, there is a certain patient-physician dynamic that gives the physician some power. In his home, we became just two people having a conversation. We left our patient and physician roles for this short time, and in the end I think that will lead to a stronger bond and understanding the next time we meet as a team in the office.