

Gratitude – Keeping My Plate Full

Sabina A. Khan, MD, Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatric Anesthesiology, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Texas
Assistant Program Director, Pediatric Anesthesiology Fellowship Program ; Director, Pediatric Anesthesiology Scoliosis Program

ABSTRACT

“The Best Attitude Is Gratitude - Keeping My Plate Full” is a personal reflection on my experiences as a pediatric anesthesiologist and the role that gratitude has played in my life and career. I discuss my journey to becoming a physician, including struggles as an immigrant and a mother with a child who was diagnosed with leukemia. The abstract highlights the importance of teamwork and the support and compassion of others in helping me through difficult times. It also discusses my work as a pediatric anesthesiologist, including the challenges and successes I experienced. Through this article, my goal is to emphasize the importance of gratitude that helps overcome challenges and find joy and fulfillment in work.

DISCUSSION

This quote by Melody Beattie, *“Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity. It makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow,”* profoundly resonated with me. It took on a deeper meaning during my journey as a pediatric anesthesiologist in the Middle East.

My husband's offer to move to the Middle East for work led me to reflect on my life. I had been through a tumultuous three years since my son's leukemia diagnosis, learning to compartmentalize my emotions while juggling work and caregiving. The support from both my colleagues and fellow parents had been a lifeline. Despite the challenges, I knew I was fortunate, having come to the U.S. as an immigrant, persevered through residency, and found a fulfilling career in anesthesiology.

The residency and fellowship had honed my skills, emphasizing teamwork and patient safety. I faced many challenging cases and learned to stand up for evidence-based practices. My mentors played a crucial role in shaping me into a compassionate and competent physician. However, my move to the Middle East exposed me to substandard practices and team discord.



CONCLUSION

The chaotic journey had finally transformed into a clear path. My vision was within reach, and a profound sense of peace settled in my heart. I had indeed made a significant change, and in the process, I had learned the art of gratitude.

DISCUSSION

I refused to compromise on patient safety and worked tirelessly to establish better practices. I came to realize the profound impact of the exceptional training and mentorship I had received, which was translating into tangible improvements in patient outcomes. There were moments when I stood firm against the pressure to compromise on patient safety for high-risk, complex cases undergoing elective procedures. Through my actions, I demonstrated that it wasn't just our outstanding clinical training, but also our unwavering commitment to patient safety that distinguished us as proficient anesthesiologists.

Each passing day presented increasing isolation and stress due to the challenges I faced. What kept me grounded was the invaluable guidance from my mentors. I felt gratitude towards the system that had instilled in me the courage to stand up in the face of adversity and be a staunch advocate for patients. To channel this gratitude, I started documenting my journey in a journal, filling a page every Friday.

As I navigated the path to achieving excellence and safety in patient care, my gratitude journal continued to expand. I chronicled the unmatched support and love of my husband during our uncertain journey as newlyweds and immigrants. I wrote about cherishing the health of my son, who, despite a major medical diagnosis, received the most advanced treatment. I expressed my appreciation for being surrounded by my ever-supportive family living nearby. I felt proud and thankful for the training I received in the U.S.

I had never before acknowledged or confronted my vulnerabilities, but embracing them only heightened the immense gratitude that now overflowed in my heart. Every morning, I rose after stumbling the day before, never losing faith in my ability to make a difference.

During my two-year tenure there, I introduced and established several safety protocols. While I wasn't in a perfect system, I remained grateful for the training, skills, and, most importantly, the courage that allowed me to transform the situation. I tackled each day one step at a time. In the fall of 2021, my family and I decided to return to the U.S., and I was warmly welcomed back at my previous workplace. Within days, I escorted a patient to the recovery unit after a neuromuscular scoliosis repair. The mother, with tears in her eyes, embraced me tightly. The resident commended the excellent work and thanked me for a successful day. The surgeon expressed his confidence in having me in the operating room. I humbly attributed the positive outcome to our closely-knit perioperative team's dedication and outstanding teamwork, all geared toward a common goal – patient safety.