

# To the Editor: Let's Be Like Spiderman

I read Dr Biewald's article on tenterhooks, as she described her experience with the "tall doctor who did not introduce himself."<sup>1</sup> This article from the October 2021 issue of the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education* highlights the importance of empathy in medicine.

I am a community cardiologist with an interest in education. I was trained under a multitude of styles. As a trainee, I witnessed my preceptor call a patient "fat" and had the wrenching experience of being present while he berated her. I was also trained by a cardiologist who worked tirelessly to obtain special permission for a tenuous patient to have her dog beside her in the cardiac critical care unit. I learned from everyone, but luckily, I had more exposure to encounters resembling the latter rather than the former. I deliberately modeled those whom I saw as empathetic with good bedside manner.

Much of what we learn is latent in the hidden curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Role modeling and following the examples of those we observe play a major role in encouraging our growth and the development of our professional identity and conduct.<sup>3</sup> The issue arises

when those we observe are not ideal in the way they teach or conduct patient care.

We hold great power to influence our learners, and as Spiderman discovered, "with great power comes great responsibility." I believe this adage holds as true to us as it does to Spiderman. Let's all recall the wisdom of these words as we go forth caring for patients and molding the attitudes of our learners.

**Kala Kathirgamanathan** , MD, FRCPC  
Cardiologist, KMH Cardiology, Ontario, Canada

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Julie Nyquist, one of the most empathetic educators I know.

---

## References

1. Biewald M. Trying: on teaching empathy. *J Grad Med Educ.* 2021;13(5):727–728. doi:10.4300/JGME-D-21-00417.1
2. Ludmerer KM. The development of American medical education from the turn of the century to the era of managed care. *Clin Orthop Relat Res.* 2004;(422):256–262. doi:10.1097/01.blo.0000131257.59585.b0
3. Walker B Jr, Mouton C. Medical education in the 21st century. *J Health Care Poor Underserved.* 2009;20(3):617–624. doi:10.1353/hpu.0.0173