

Fulfillment within success: A physician's dilemma

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They say success without fulfillment is of little value in life. Whether this concept is actually driving the spate of depression and substance abuse currently experienced by youth and middle-aged adults in developed countries is rarely discussed and needs to be explored.

We have all reflected on the tragic ends of Anthony Bourdain, Kate Spade, and Robin Williams. Much has been said about the accolades they achieved and the heights they scaled, and just as much about their struggles with substance abuse over the years. Sensational portrayals by the media also encouraged youth to spend time dissecting the details of these high-profile deaths, lending popularity to the notion of suicide contagion. But somewhere in the myriad theories and conclusions, we still seem baffled by the questions of why these suicides occurred, and why no one had seen them coming.

As humans, we are designed to build. For many people, including physicians, the final product is a rewarding career built on years of hard work, or a flourishing family to look back on be proud of. Sometimes, however, these larger ideas barely intersect with our pictures of success.

As physicians and high achievers, we dream of goals and ambitions and set stringent deadlines for achieving them. Falling short sometimes finds us grappling with self-punishment and doubt. When one goal is achieved, another one is

automatically created, or the goal post is pushed further. And the cycle continues.

Having said this, I will ask: What are you looking for? What is it that will give you a sense of purpose?

This is not a redundant question, nor is it an easy one. So are you really taking the time to think about it? Does any of this border on self-reflection and self-awareness for you? If it does, then developing that insight into yourself is perhaps a better way of serving your patients.

Peace and gratification often lie in the little things; not everything you do has to be acknowledged with an award. There is a sense of fulfillment that comes from developing others. The key is to realize that there is never a moment to start doing that—it is an ongoing journey. Therefore, give generously, of your time, of your skills, of your knowledge, but above all, of your kindness. Do it because in the end, you will have something to look back on and be proud of. Do it because maybe somewhere you will find meaning in it. And your success may not be bereft of fulfillment.



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