



NJMS PEOPLE DO YOU KNOW?

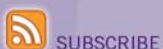
When we stumbled upon a blog by this name, we couldn't resist asking the author, who is in her first year at NJMS, "Why do it?"



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posted by Elena Miriam Welt

At least a million times a day I wonder how people got through medical school before the age of personal computers. When I sit on my bed re-listening to the biochemistry lectures on iTunes while simultaneously looking up the concepts I don't understand online and taking what must be 100 Facebook and Twitter breaks an hour, I imagine how different my studying would be without the internet. One thing, though, is for sure: I am much more productive when I turn off my wireless signal.

Besides the endless medical resources and distraction possibilities the internet provides, it is also an incredible tool for keeping in touch with family and friends. In the months between getting accepted at NJMS and actually starting school here last fall, there was plenty of time for nerves to build. My biggest fear was not that I wouldn't be able to keep up with the work, or that I would be living in a new city with a somewhat ambiguous (at best) reputation, but rather that once school started I wouldn't have time to maintain my relationships outside medical school.

I came up with the idea of a blog so that people wouldn't forget about me as I became busier and more involved with classes and electives here. But, it's quickly become both enjoyable and stress-relieving while keeping me grounded in the real world.

One example of how the blog connects me to the outside world is the way it forces me to see my vocabulary now. In just a few months, medical school has drastically changed that vocabulary, and I don't just mean the countless new names of enzymes or nerves that I have laboriously committed to memory. MGM, ACE, and the OSCE are not things that exist in the real world, but right now my life completely revolves around these three pneumonics. The first two are names of first-year courses, and the last is a type of exam. Defining all those abbreviations and terms is not only informative for people who read the blog, but the process reminds me that I am living in a bubble.

While it seems like the impossibly distant future, I am told that one day my life really will revolve around patients, not just pneumonics and abbreviations. Spending my days memorizing lists and structures, it is so easy to lose sight of the big picture. Though elective course offerings do get students outside this bubble by connecting us with the community, something as simple as updating my blog also helps. In the blog, as I describe the tests I take, my studying, or how I spend free time, I force myself to think about why I'm doing what I'm doing. And, as my class crosses milestones (Finishing biochem! Taking our first OSCE!), the blog helps me keep track of how far we've come on the path to becoming physicians.

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of the FOCUS Community Health Center. Located on Broad Street in Newark, FOCUS provides medical services to the Latino community. From 2001 through 2005, Natale served as the associate medical director and then as the medical director, where she developed strong relationships with the community and her patients. Her responsibilities also included teaching and mentoring students and internal medicine residents, who had the unique experience of working in a culturally and linguistically competent environment where the patient was the center of care.

After FOCUS, Natale became the medical director of Community Based Networks in the Division of Academic Medicine, Geriatrics, and Community Programs until 2007. And in 2006, with the support and mentorship of Debbie Salas-Lopez, MD, Natale became principal investigator on the Cancer Prevention and Treatment Demonstration Project for Ethnic Minorities, a four-year, \$2.8 million grant through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Based on what they had learned at FOCUS, Natale's team developed a proposal to facilitate cancer screening and care for elderly Latinos through patient navigation. Now in their fourth and final year of the CMS grant, the team operates a patient navigation program with more than 1200 participants across multiple counties. A "community-based approach" to patient navigation, they help the Latino community overcome barriers to cancer screening. "It is about their selfless personalities, their ability to problem-solve, their advocacy, and their passion for people," Natale says describing the patient navigators.

The CMS grant has been particularly important to Natale because it is community-based. She is "very positive with her efforts in helping the community," says Connie Muñoz, a CMS patient navigator.

"Understanding people helps get them to a better position in their health. I truly believe that. If you just look at the health issue or the illness you can't help them get better. You need to focus on everything

about them—their social determinants of health are just as important," she says.

But Natale's passion isn't solely rooted in community—she has been fiercely dedicated to cancer research and prevention since her father died of lung cancer in 2000. Since then, she completed a junior faculty sabbatical with the National Cancer Institute's Redes en Acción Program and served as a principal investigator and co-investigator on various cancer-related grants. She also participated in the Cancer, Culture, and Literacy fellowship through the Moffitt Cancer Center and a Leadership Fellowship with the National Hispanic Medical Association.

It is no surprise that the inspiration for her work has been her father—Natale's most important community is her family. Her eyes sparkle as she talks about her grandmother, who worked two jobs after immigrating to America and taught Natale the importance of having a work ethic. She smiles as she describes her busy household,

which includes her 3-year-old triplets (girls), her 7-year-old son, and her husband, Gustavo, her high school sweetheart. Her free time is dedicated to her extended family, who share some of Natale's passions: they participate together in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk in the fall and the Relay for Life walk in the spring.

Despite all that Natale has accomplished, she maintains strong ambitions. Among her goals are to make patient navigation a standard of care in "the healthcare experience" and "to deliver comprehensive, patient-centered care for the community, reducing health inequalities, and in the process allow students to be part of that experience."

Our interview ends, and I reach out to shake this doctor's hand. I am met instead with a warm hug. As I walk away, she flashes a bright smile, and in that moment, I see the 8-year-old girl, completely in her element and filled with determination and dreams—still. ●

A med student walks into a bar... *Continued from page 11*

The blog also keeps me grounded in another way. When I start getting concerned emails from friends and family feeling sorry for me, I know that I am wallowing too much. Yes, med school is hard. But not only is it a choice I made; it's also an incredible privilege to be here.

Sometimes it's easier to write about the negatives. But there are many positives here too. Before each test, many of my classmates send out helpful study guides and PDFs of practice questions to the entire class. And there are those who plan awesome social events and nights out for everyone.

Although being a doctor is something I've wanted to do since high school, reading and writing have always been an enormous part of my life. Starting a blog was a selfish excuse to write whatever I wanted in a forum people might actually read (as opposed to journals I've kept which are secret, hidden files in my computer). I've always felt the need to document life, and medical school is no different.

Right now is an incredible time to be entering medicine. My class will be graduating in 2014, just as most of the provisions in the healthcare reform bill are enacted. No one knows for sure what the future will be like for doctors or for healthcare in general, but I am excited to be part of the changes and will keep track of them as they unfold. If nothing else, years from now I will be able to look back in the blog, and laugh at myself for how wrong I was about predicting my own future.

Check out <http://amedstudentwalksintoabar.blogspot.com>.