New Academic Year, New Chapter

Carmel Bogle, MD

Shortly after finishing college, I remember meeting my mentor's daughter. She was the sweetest little girl, the first of my friends to have a child. My mentor mentioned though she loved to play, she often got easily winded and had to start taking medicine. Meeting her for the first time, she smiled during the nebulizer treatment that she took to help her breathing. Though our encounter was brief, she remained on my heart as such a sweet young girl.

I followed several months later as the family learned that she in fact did not have asthma, but something called "dilated cardiomyopathy". Her heart was too big and not working well enough and she would need a heart transplant. Reading their journey online, I was captivated as they traveled from one hospital to another to go through numerous tests to decide if she'd be eligible to be listed for a heart transplant. There was only a brief reprise when she was able to be listed and then came the arduous, uncertainty that comes from waiting. There was lots of travel back and forth and split time during a time when they would want nothing more than to soak up all the family time together. One family member waited in the hospital while the other navigating work, bills, etc. another state away. It seemed too much. However, several months later, they shared a picture shortly after her transplant of her precious body sitting up asleep with her sternal dressing, followed by a second picture of her playing. They noted how much energy she had now, and it seemed to make the onerous journey for them more worthwhile. Those pictures remained etched in my mind. Though our lives had drifted apart, I was overwhelmed with joy to see graduation pictures shared several weeks ago and see her bright smile. It has been such a gift to see the remarkable young woman she has grown to be teeming with compassion, creativity and intellect.

Much like her graduation, there is a group of physicians that will also graduate from a long and demanding journey. Whether it is the final graduation of completing their 4th year where they will now embark on this much anticipated journey of being a pediatric heart transplant physician or the final chapter to their training of entering 4th year heart failure/transplant fellowship, it should be one met with immense pride for both themselves and the countless mentors, family members and patients that helped them to get to this stage.

What motivates us to continue another year of training? It's hard to explain it to those that haven't seen the look of hope in a child and their family's eyes when they receive the news that a heart is available. Or the wonder (and scariness) of watching a heart barely squeeze and then watch that same young child bounce away playfully while a parent races after them with their Berlin device a short while later. Those experiences that engrave into your core memory and the privilege to do that as part of your everyday job is a wonder.

To my mentors: I truly thank you. Thank you for answering my endless questions and calls in the middle of the night to make sure I made the right call on a patient. Thank you for sharing stories of your patients' vacations, weddings and future graduations and being an example of how to see the patient beyond the hospital gown. Thank you also for seeing me beyond just a trainee but as one with potential and providing opportunities both clinically and research related. Thank you for expanding my circle so that the pool of mentors and colleagues I could call in a pinch or to just run an idea by only continues to grow. I am truly forever grateful that you took a chance on me.

To the incoming 4th years: Welcome! Some might be starting bright eyed to FINALLY practice their passion, while some might be weary from the past 6 years of intense post-graduate training. Perhaps, most likely, a combination of both. Studies have noted that burnout can be high for our pediatric cardiology fellows, especially in high-pressure clinical settings (1). Many trainees can struggle with imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and feel the heavy weight of clinical responsibility (2). During these times of struggle, I encourage you to press into your inner drive that brought you here. Fourth year provides the opportunity for individualized education that addresses not only learning gaps and ensuring competence, but also ensures goals for your

New Academic Year, New Chapter

Carmel Bogle, MD

specific career path and autonomy (3). The days might seem long, but the year overall will go fast at lightning speed. Therefore, ensure you expose yourself to take up every opportunity that comes your way. Don't be afraid to ask "dumb" questions of your attendings because in 365 days from now, it will be harder to ask and the question will inevitably come at three in the morning. You never know when that experience will come in handy down the road. Studies have noted that as trainees we can often be so focused on the "what": the task at hand, that we can often lose sight of the long-term outcomes and care for the patients (4). Therefore, despite the many checkboxes that you will have on your list, I encourage you to take the extra time to really get to know your patients and their families. Play that extra round of Uno or take the extra lap around the unit for you never know the impact it can have on that patient or their family. It will make the long calls more worth it. Also know that you are not alone but have joined a village of experts and colleagues that are cheering you on.

To the patients and families: thank you for allowing us to be part of such a delicate season in your life. Thank you for the extra grace of allowing the new face of a 4th year to be part of your lives even for just a little while. Though the time may be brief, their experience with you will stay with them and empower them to deliver better and more effective care to families in the future.

As heart transplant providers, we are in an exciting time where the testing, treatment and devices are continuously changing to allow more patients to see graduations, weddings and perhaps even one day – grandchildren. The mentorship and community we have built thus far will only grow as we grow stronger moving forward together as one community. I am so grateful for my mentors that formed my foundation in pediatric transplantation and gave me the wings to fly. Their passion to deliver the highest level of patient care with compassion, hands on mentorship and clinically relevant research have made the fabric of my clinical DNA. Their words of wisdom echo in my mind while I discuss hard news to a patient or discuss therapies for patients. Though I still have much to learn, it has inspired me to continue that pattern of mentorship for the trainees that come after me. Therefore, may the beginning of this academic year help remind us all why we joined this exclusive club. Studies have shown that we do hard work! Burn out rates can be high (5). So why do we stay? Why do we show up and do what we do everyday? The professional fulfillment of impacting a child and their families' lives can't be beat and is worth it's journey to get there. Happy July!

References:

1. McCormick AD, Lim HM, Strohacker CM, Yu S, Lowery R, Vitale C, Ligsay A, Aiyagari R, Schumacher KR, Fifer CG, Owens ST, Cousino MK. Paediatric cardiology training: burnout, fulfilment, and fears. Cardiol Young. 2023 Jan 24:1-8. doi: 10.1017/S1047951123000148. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 36691819.

2. Brown DW, Binney G, Gauthier Z, Blume ED. Fears and Stressors of Trainees Starting Fellowship in Pediatric Cardiology. Pediatr Cardiol. 2020 Apr;41(4):677-682. doi: 10.1007/s00246-019-02276-z. Epub 2019 Dec 21. PMID: 31865443.

3. Gifford KA, Thoreson L, Burke AE, Lockspeiser TM, Lockwood LZ, Reed S, Schumacher DJ, Mahan JD. Describing Overarching Curricular Goals for Individualized Education. Teach Learn Med. 2021 Jun-Jul;33(3):282-291. doi: 10.1080/10401334.2020.1835665. Epub 2020 Dec 23. PMID: 33356608.

4. Gifford KA, Kieffer KA, Choi E. How Do Postgraduate Trainees Prepare for New Clinical Learning Environments. J Grad Med Educ. 2023 Apr;15(2):252-256. doi: 10.4300/JGME-D-22-00300.1. Epub 2023 Apr 17. PMID: 37139202; PMCID: PMC10150812.

5. Cousino MK, Bogle C, Lim HM, McCormick AD, Sturza J, Fredericks EM, Magee JC, Blume ED. Burnout, professional fulfillment, and post-traumatic stress among pediatric solid organ transplant teams. Pediatr Transplant. 2021 Jun;25(4):e14020. doi: 10.1111/petr.14020. Epub 2021 Apr 16. PMID: 33861499; PMCID: PMC9031412.