



DAY ONE

BY MOLLY TAYLOR ('13)

SHEEPISHLY MAKE MY WAY THROUGH THE CROWDED, chaotic waiting room of Friend Family Health Center, one of the free primary care clinics here on Chicago's South Side. Above the cries of sick children and scolding words of sleep-deprived parents I hear a voice from behind the check-in counter shout, "Dr. Taylor!" I instinctively look over my shoulder for the actual doctor the nurse must be looking for. Although I have an oversized piece of paper and some new business cards that identify me as a medical doctor, I still feel like I belong in the waiting room, not behind that counter.

Day One of residency is sort of like going to a foreign country—and then being asked to be the tour guide. In addition to adjusting to the work, there's the stress of moving to a new city all by yourself, leaving behind almost everyone and everything familiar. I am lucky to have come from Geisel, a loving community that challenged and encouraged me, but there are some things you just can't prepare for.

I am doing my pediatrics residency at the University of Chicago, in the Hyde Park neighborhood. Just a few blocks from affluent university neighborhoods lie some of the most dangerous and impoverished areas in the U.S. In addition to learning math and history, kids here have to memorize the territories of different gangs to avoid inadvertently crossing a line. I'm not in Hanover anymore.

The charge nurse, Sharon, leads me back to the physician's workroom, calling out

instructions over her shoulder. "Tamike will be your MA for the day. She'll turn the blue dot to red when your patient is here, flip out the black, yellow, and white flags when she's in the room, then you flip down the white flag and leave the black and yellow when you're in the room. Put up the white and black flags when you need her to do something. Take down the yellow flag after you're done. Do not forget to take down the black flag or it will put the whole clinic behind schedule. Okay, your first patient's here." Right about now, I'm hoping the real Dr. Taylor they were calling for shows up soon.

I fumble through the new computer system, trying at least to find my patient's name and age, and I see an old progress note. Antwan is now six years old, living with his grandmother and eight other children in a one-bedroom apartment. Both of his parents are incarcerated. He's

not in school, has gotten hardly any of his vaccinations, and has come to the doctor only twice before. He's here today because he has a sore throat and splitting headaches that keep him up at night. Alright, Dr. Taylor, now would be a great time for you to walk through that door.

I enter the room and see a scrawny little boy curled up on the exam table, moaning occasionally. His grandmother is dozing off in the chair next to the table. I tap him on the shoulder and am about to launch into my carefully rehearsed introduction, but when Antwan sits up something doesn't seem right. He is having a hard time breathing, and he's drooling. I don't have the knowledge or experience yet to know exactly what to do, but I do have some instinct to know when someone needs immediate help. I turn around instantly and get the attending doctor overseeing me that day to come take a look at Antwan. Five minutes later, Antwan and his grandmother are in an ambulance on their way to the children's hospital to get a neck CT scan to look for a throat abscess.

With sweaty palms I type up a quick note about Antwan and then make my way over to the hospital to finish up my other work from the day. About an hour after I first saw him, I run into Antwan and his grandmother coming out of the radiology department.

"Dr. Taylor! Hey! They said he was okay, nothing's wrong with his neck. We're going to stay here tonight just to keep an eye on him, but they said he's okay. Thank you for looking out for him. We don't have a regular doctor—do you think you could be Antwan's doctor from now on?"

And there it is. The moment that makes it all worth it. All the sleep deprivation, all the hours of studying, all the missed phone calls, all the microwave dinners. That moment—when you feel you've made a difference in someone's life—is the incredible privilege we have in medicine. As I move through residency, I'm sure I'll be overwhelmed, unsure, and uncomfortable. But I'm equally sure I'll be inspired, motivated, and honored, and I will constantly strive to become the Dr. Taylor that Antwan needs me to be, starting from Day One.

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