

2020-2021 Golden Stethoscope Nomination

Dr. Juan Lessing

Nominated for: Best role model

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

These are the things I’ll treasure for decades about my pre-clinical years working on the ACE service with Dr. Juan Lessing. Foremost will be the way he runs a medicine team. He gently sets the norms and expectations for the team at the beginning of rounds. “I’m the team’s coach,” he reminds us, and he defers leadership to the most senior resident. The residents facilitate discussion about each patient and guide care decisions. Dr. Lessing gives his input sparingly when the team looks to him. He interjects with key teaching points only at critical junctures.

One such moment was when the team made an error in timing; an important loop wasn’t closed. A patient’s INR result came back supratherapeutic, and the team didn’t put in the order to hold the next dose of warfarin in time. Dr. Lessing focused on how to make the situation right; he modeled disclosing the error — which fortunately had no adverse outcome — to the patient. He coached the team through reporting the error to the hospital. He did all this with poise and without casting blame.

In this way Dr. Lessing shared with me a range of what it’s like to practice Internal Medicine — from the good to the difficult. I’ll recall the joy he sparked in a hyponatremic patient when he elicited the story behind her necklace. I recall too when he skillfully deferred the non-urgent questions of a patient who had been hospitalized for weeks awaiting a community placement. Afterward he reflected on the balance between honoring a patient’s questions and giving adequate time to each patient. He welcomed my feedback on how that interaction had gone, genuinely curious to hear my thoughts on his patient communication. I never found his communication lacking.

Finally, his passion for clinical reasoning is clear in the way he teaches. One day as we discussed a patient with a clotting disorder, he guided me through the logic of coagulation. The way he asked questions prompted insight and met me right where I was in my (admittedly rudimentary) knowledge. Rather than insisting I memorize the clotting cascade, our discussion illuminated the logic of working-up a clotting disorder.

I cherish each chance to learn from Dr. Lessing. As with his patients, there are times in the controlled chaos of the hospital when I have the full light of Dr. Lessing’s attention. I hope to one day emulate one iota of his patience, wisdom, and warmth in the care I show patients and colleagues.

Written by: Andrew Willis