

THE WINDS THAT CARRY US

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The morning sun gently kisses my cheeks, and a soft breeze carries my hair as I ascend the winding hill. The hospital's silhouette emerges faintly on the horizon; the city still slumbers. As I move forward, there is a heaviness in my stroke, a quiet weight I have come to know well. Entering the final month of my first clinical year, exhaustion has settled deep within my bones. My mind, numb, yet restless, wrestles with an unanswered question: why? While my peers outside the realm of medicine embrace new beginnings, careers, and travels, I find myself pedalling toward fluorescent corridors and shifting wards. There is something that draws me back every morning: purpose.

At its core, medicine seems beautifully simple in its calling: to heal. The concept of purpose is woven into the fabric of our education, often passed down unconsciously by those who came before us. However, in the lived experience, it proves itself less defined. It touches every part of the human experience, extending into the emotional, the social, the existential.

In periods of exhaustion and self-doubt, I have questioned whether I am truly making a difference. Inevitably, harm will be present in healthcare, through human error, systemic barriers, or personal biases. No checklist, no passing grade, no single achievement can crystallize a moment as the fulfillment of purpose. Paradoxically, in these very moments, I have learned that it must be redefined to be restored.

Like my hair flowing in the wind as I pedal, purpose twirls and transforms, constantly in a state of becoming, leading us on this endless chase. Its nature shifts not only with new experiences, responsibilities and setbacks, but also in proximity, in tangibility, in clarity. On most days, its silhouette is obscured by

paperwork, fatigue, and routine. It is elusive yet ever-present, much like the sun on the horizon, always moving, always shifting, but always there.

In this perpetual movement, I understand that it does not reside in certainty, but in reflection. It asks not for perfect outcomes, but for presence. It requires humility to recognize our limitations, and courage to remain engaged despite them. It lies in the questions we ask ourselves in the stillness: Am I enough? Did I help? Did I grow? Imposing and relentless, it sometimes fails to inspire, manifesting as a quiet insistence. It emerges not as a guiding star, but as an overwhelming expectation, a mirror that finds us when we are most depleted, pressing against the fragile walls of self-doubt. It softly asks: Can I live up to this? Is what I give truly enough? Will I have ever fully fulfilled my purpose?

Purpose returns slowly, subtly, and prudently, in moments so small, so fleeting, they nearly escape notice. They are not grand or cinematic; they're quiet, raw, and profoundly human. They are not always acts that change the course of a disease, but they carry within them a different kind of healing. They remind me that even when medicine cannot cure, it can still care. I have found meaning not only in what I do, but in how I bear witness. In moments of grief and loss, where hope is redefined, where endings are spoken aloud, I discovered purpose in its purest form, when the role of the physician is in the act of being, not doing. Patients speak of regrets, of love, of the desire to be remembered not for their illness but for who they were. Helping them reclaim that narrative, even briefly, is among the most meaningful parts of this work. Medicine, at its core, is not only the treatment of the body but the tending to the story of the person who inhabits it.

In this, I learned that purpose acts as a guide and a mirror, revealing not only where I am headed, but also who I am becoming. In helping patients find their calling, I am reminded of my own. Thus, I brace myself; I continue this cyclical dance with this intangible, changing force.

However, I wrestle with questions I cannot fully answer. Does my impact on others define my sense of success, or is it something I carry independently? The duality between these forces, the internal drive to help, to grow, and the external need to serve and heal, often create a conflict. As my competence grows, I increasingly see patients independently, later reviewing with the resident or attending. They validate my assessment, co-sign my notes and orders, at times, without meeting the person behind the chart. The process is efficient, expected even. However, as I ride home at dusk, I ask myself: Is their sense of purpose still intact? Is this the version of medicine they once imagined when they chose this path? In moments when fatigue renders the mind mechanical and the heart distant, can a clinical encounter be purposeful without empathy if the result is still healing? As medicine becomes more technologically mediated, as time with patients is shortened, I wonder how our definitions will evolve. Will it narrow, or will it deepen in new ways we have yet to understand?

Purpose in healthcare is an individual and shared pursuit. It unites us in our collective mission, fostering a quiet solidarity passed from one person to another that builds resilience and enables us to persist even when turning away feels easier. The idealism of medicine can be easily overshadowed by the realities of practice, exposing the tension between the ethos of healthcare and its often-imperfect execution. Amid this friction, purpose reshapes itself to align with context.

Finally, purpose is not a single truth to be discovered, but an ongoing conversation with ourselves and with each other. It is shaped by every moment, every question, every doubt and every answer. As I ride into the rising light of another day, I trust that it will reveal itself once again, not as a fixed goal, but as a living, breathing force that propels me onward, always evolving, always guiding me forward. ■

Biographical Note

Léa Larochelle is a fourth-year medical student at McGill University, driven by a passion for both medicine and health advocacy. She is committed to using her clinical experiences and writing skills to enhance patient care and spark meaningful conversations in healthcare.