

dear residents

The Method That Works for You

July 24, 2022

Dear Residents,

Even the most abstract painters must have a consistent method of stretching the canvas, laying out their paints and brushes and commencing the artwork in a systematic manner. As the creativity unfolds each painting develops its own unique finished state.

No two patients are the same, but it always makes sense to start the same way and be consistent and thorough in your approach – history, examination, note writing, etc. Keeping track of information that will arrive in the future, and tasks that lie ahead of you is best done with a checklist. Keeping it in your head alone will take up precious cognitive reserve. Saving this information in a dependable, and readily retrievable place is the best approach. Some use sticky notes, others use notecards. Use what works for you. Checklists are also worthwhile for complex team-based tasks. Atul Gawande has written an entire book, [The Checklist Manifesto](#), about the value and importance of checklists to ensure safe and reliable care.



Photo by [Kasturi Roy](#) on [Unsplash](#)

We view ourselves as a rigorous program. What we are referring to here is not the physical and emotional burden of work (although we have some of that too 😊) – the reference is to the assurance that we will adhere to high standards and consistent methods to ensure the best patient care possible. Some things we do are high stakes and error prone such as consents, procedures, and blood transfusions. In these situations, there are standardized protocols which are important to follow. Solving acid-base problems, deciphering hyponatremia, or working up anemia are also best accomplished by following logical pathways.

Medical care is a complex enterprise. Processes will fail and errors will occur. Adherence to a consistent method provides a window to understand error and facilitates the construction of new and improved processes. A rigorous approach to patient care necessitates an equally rigorous method for reporting and analyzing errors.

Our collective work creates an enormous catalogue of information – a record of our successes and failures. We overtreat, we undertreat, we are prone to bias and to systematic error. A commitment to exploring and understanding the inputs, processes and outputs of our healthcare enterprise is critical to continuously improving what we do and how we do it.

Not everything comes together neatly. There are headscratchers and puzzles waiting to be solved. I hope that these will spark your curiosity and form the basis of a case report or a research project.

Each one of you will ultimately become very singular clinicians. Residency training attempts to give you that core competence and a set of reliable tools so that you may flourish along your own path.

Wishing you a wonderful week,

Dino Kazi