

dear residents

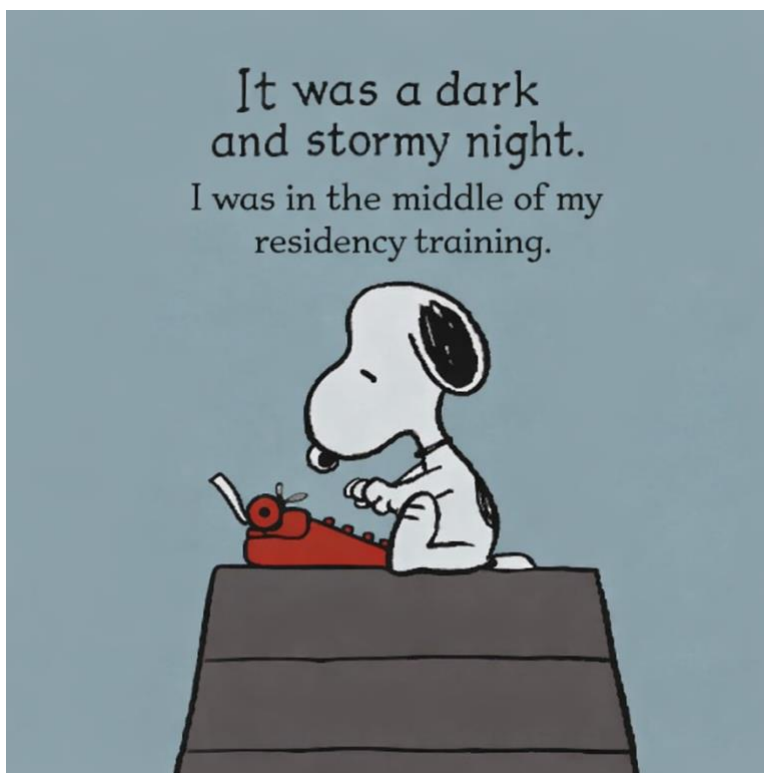
Training, Safety and the Shape of Change

February 1, 2026

Dear Residents,

Dallas reminded us this past week that winter can still surprise us. Ice on the roads, uncertainty about travel, and the quiet calculations we all make about safety. What struck me most during this recent storm was not just the weather itself, but something new: the availability of a safe ride program for residents and fellows. That may sound like a small operational detail, but it represents something much larger, a real shift in culture.

When I think back to my own residency and fellowship training, vulnerability was not a word we used often. There was an unspoken assumption that trainees were made of steel, unbreakable, endlessly resilient, capable of feats of endurance regardless of circumstance. Weather, fatigue, and personal safety were background noise, not reasons to pause. I recall our primary care clinic preceptor reminding us that “death or near-death” were the only reasons to miss clinic. It was offered with a smile, but beneath the humor was an unspoken expectation about endurance and obligation that we all understood.



In my PGY-2 year, I vividly remember an ice storm in December 1989 in Houston of all places. My car slid unpredictably across the roads as I made my way in before dawn. During my subsequent fellowship, especially as the sole rheumatology fellow, I was on continuous call for long stretches. One night, I drove into the emergency room parking lot after being paged. A song was playing on the radio, Pearl Jam's *Daughter*. It was the age of grunge music. Grunge rejected false optimism; it was raw, distorted, and unafraid to name exhaustion, anger, and alienation. It was a new sound, saying things that we felt but never voiced. I remember deciding to sit there until the song finished, not wanting to cut it off.

The trouble was that I fell asleep right there in the car.

Thirty minutes later, the emergency department paged again, wondering where I was. I woke up disoriented, alone in the dark, at that witching hour when fatigue plays tricks on your sense of time and place. I gathered myself, walked in, and saw the patient. At the time, this felt almost normal, a private moment of exhaustion folded into the larger expectation that you simply pushed through.

We no longer train that way, and that is a good thing.

COVID forced medicine to confront something we had long minimized. Trainees are as vulnerable as anyone else, physically, emotionally, and humanly. Ice storms, pandemics, and long nights have taught us that safety is not a luxury or a sign of weakness. It is a professional responsibility, shared by individuals and institutions alike.

Doing away with schedules that require feats of endurance, building systems that anticipate risk, and offering something as concrete as a safe ride program are not signs that the profession has softened. They are signs that it has matured.

I remain deeply grateful for how seriously you take your calling and for the devotion you show your patients, even when conditions are difficult. I am equally grateful that the culture of training continues to bend, slowly but unmistakably, toward wisdom.

Medicine will always ask much of you. But it is learning not to ask everything of you.

Stay safe, take care of one another, and thank you for your dedication, your professionalism, and your humanity.

With gratitude,
Dino Kazi