

The Power of Enough

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This column is adapted from Dr Lin's presidential address at the 2026 STFM Medical Student Education Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, approximately 1 week after the shooting of ICU nurse Alex Pretti by federal immigration enforcement agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I want to bring you to a place we've all visited: the 3:00 AM ceiling. It's that hour of the night when the house is quiet, but your mind is a roar of everything you couldn't fix. It's the face of the Uber driver who couldn't afford his meds because he lost his insurance. It's the tears of the mother whose child is in the hospital because of measles. It's the frantic text from the medical student who was detained at the airport, and the desperate call from the resident whose family was taken away by ICE agents. It's the news notification on your phone about a world that feels increasingly fractured, dangerous, and indifferent to suffering.

In those moments, the voice in our heads is never a kind one. It doesn't list our day's successes. It doesn't remember our hard work. Instead, it whispers a single, devastating lie.

"You are not doing enough."

It tells us that to be a "good" family physician, we must be everything to everyone. We must be a social worker, a therapist, a human rights advocate, a tireless machine—all while maintaining a 5-star patient satisfaction rating. The storm is raging, and here we are trying to hold back the tide with a plastic bucket.

But I am here today, looking at the brightest minds and biggest hearts in medicine, to tell you something different. I am here to tell you that the voice is wrong.

We are trained in a culture of "more." More patients, more publications, more grants, more advocacy. We've been conditioned to believe that if we just worked a little harder or slept a little less, we could fix the systemic failures of

our society, shield our entire community from harm, and save more people. The struggle we feel today—the moral injury, the exhaustion—comes from a beautiful, but dangerous place.

But "more" is a treadmill with no stop button.

When we say we aren't enough, what we are really saying is that we aren't infinite. And we were never meant to be. The world today is chaotic. The threats—to our patients' health, to our communities' safety, to our very democracy—are real. But the weight of the world is not meant to be carried by our shoulders alone.

So, what does it mean to be "enough"?

Being enough isn't about lowered expectations. It is about *radical presence*. Think about the patient who comes to you not for a prescription, but because you are the only person in their life who truly *listens* to them. You didn't solve their problems. You didn't fix the broken health care system. But for 15 minutes, you looked them in the eyes and validated their existence, their worth.

In that room, you were enough.

Think about the student or resident who was ready to quit, until you sat down and shared a story of your own failure. You didn't fix primary care. You didn't solve the burnout crisis. But you gave that learner the permission to be human.

In that moment, you were enough.

We often overlook these small, quiet acts of heroism because they don't show up on the news or on a social media post. But these are the moments where the world is *actually* healed—not with grand gestures of performative activism, but with genuine acts of love. We defend our communities one conversation, one vaccination, and one empathetic silence at a time.

Now I want to speak directly to students and residents. You are entering a profession that is being reshaped

by artificial intelligence, by attacks on truth and science, and by unprecedented geopolitical instability. You might feel like you have to be superhuman to survive.

Please hear me: your value is not found in your board scores. It is not found in how many notes you close before midnight, nor how many posters and papers you have on your resume.

Your value is in your *humanity*. You chose family medicine because you love people. Your empathy is your superpower. In a desensitized world, radical presence is radical healing. You don't have to be perfect to be a “good” family physician. You just have to show up.

The beauty of STFM is that we always show up for each other. We are enough because we have one another. We are enough because our mission—to teach, to heal, and to serve

—is the ultimate act of defiance against a world that tries to make us feel small.

So, as you begin this conference and head to your posters and workshops, I want you to make space for one another and carry a new mantra with you.

When the world demands more than you have to give...

When the system fails you and the people you've promised to protect...

When you hear the shadowy voice of “not enough” creeping in...

Take a breath. Remember this room. And say to yourself:

“I am a teacher. I am a healer. I am human. And I am more than enough.”

Thank you, STFM. Let's go out and be enough for the world together.