

Alumni Profile] Adam Possner: Medicine and the Humanities

ADAM POSSNER (M.D. 2006)
can't say if being a doctor makes him a better poet, but he's convinced that being a poet makes him a better doctor.

"I think it indulges a sensitivity toward others and toward what's going on around me, which makes me a better person," he says, "which in turn makes me a better physician. I think the best physicians are people who can diagnose and treat but who also try to cultivate their humanity."

As a resident at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, he organized a guided tour of a steel mill in town and the Port of Baltimore terminals so that his colleagues could better understand the everyday lives of many of

their patients. "Seeing where someone works helps you empathize and connect more deeply with them," says Possner, originally from Louisville, Kentucky, and now an assistant professor of general internal medicine at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

"There's a move to get trainees, as well as people in practice, to be more than just repositories of medical knowledge," he adds. "You really have to take into account the person you're dealing with in order to better treat them. That's what medical humanities, in a circuitous kind of way, is all about: becoming more observant and sensitive to the human being in front of you."

For Possner, poetry is an integral part of that process. His work has been

published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *Pbaros*, and even the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which rarely publishes poems.

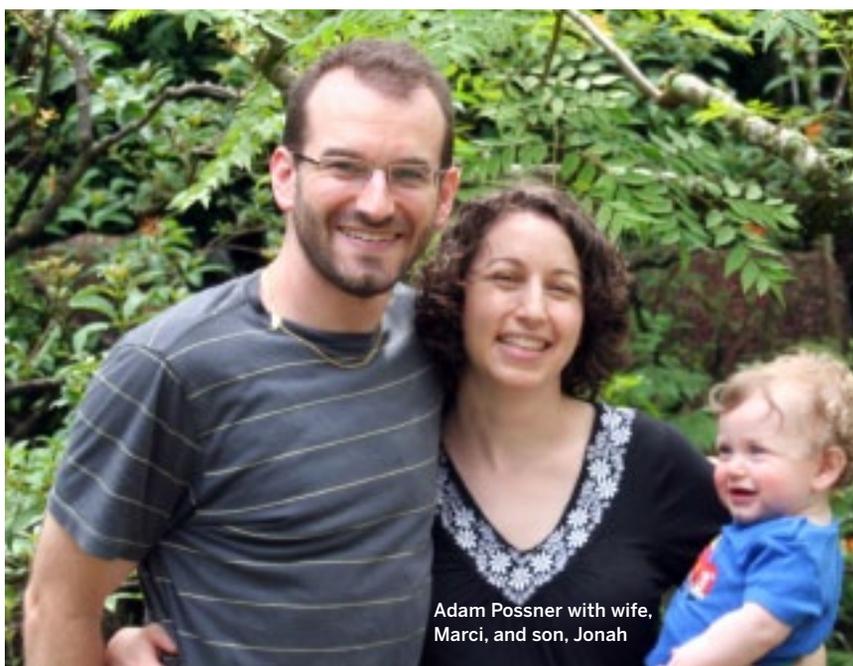
Possner's poems saw the light of print for the first time when he was in his second year of medical school, in a now-defunct student-run publication called *Michigan Medical Journal*. "When they were published, that really got me thinking that this is a love of something that I can share with other people," he says.

His Michigan experience had a profound effect on him in both the literary and medical realms.

"I enjoy medicine so much," says the former recipient of the James C. Hays, M.D., Scholarship. "I really love it. And that started at Michigan. If I had not had such great experiences with my fellow students and professors and attendings, I probably wouldn't be doing general internal medicine, which I chose because I love all of medicine."

One of his mentors at Michigan was Philip Zazove, M.D., interim chair and professor of family medicine, as well as author of several non-medical books. "It was great to see a physician in the flesh who's a writer," says Possner. "There were some fantastic ones that I'd read, but Philip was the first one I came to actually know. I thought maybe I could do it, too."

Possner sees more than a passing resemblance between his two passions. "Medicine, like poetry, is a hugely meaningful way of interacting



Adam Possner with wife, Marci, and son, Jonah

with people — and in such a short amount of time, relatively speaking,” he says. “I mean, I’ve got 15 minutes with a patient. That’s like poetry.” —JEFF MORTIMER

The Cough

*On the subway beaded in to work
the people sit as in a waiting room
keeping quiet keen
for their destinations to be announced.*

*Station becomes blackness becomes station
as the doors open and close, open and
close quickly click
breathing people out and in with each stop.*

*At first, just a few notice her
a woman in her 40s, smartly dressed
contained in the crowded car
but soon everyone notices her cough.*

*It starts off demure, as from a tickle
then stronger, yet innocent still
kind of like clearing mild congestion
until she is backing almost non-stop.*

*From behind eyelids, newspapers, smart phones
fellow passengers try to pretend but
can’t quite conceal
their uneasiness.*

*So they bide within shallow breath until
finally she starts to move toward the door
Coming through! cough click
leaving all to breathe a sigh of relief.*

—Adam Possner, M.D.

Class Notes

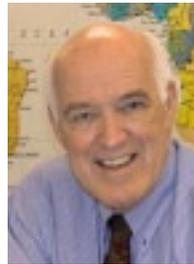
60s]

William B. Comai (M.D. 1961) was honored for decades of work con-



cerning the health care needs of the people of Calhoun County, Michigan, with a fund in his name at the Battle Creek Community Foundation. Comai, a surgeon, retired from the Battle Creek Health System in 2007.

Larry Miller (M.D. 1965) received the



2012 BioMed SA Julio Palmaz Award for Innovation in Healthcare and the Biosciences. The award recognizes his contributions to the field of

medicine and his pioneering role in using intraosseous vascular access to improve patient care and save lives. Miller practiced emergency medicine for 30 years and is the founder and chief medical officer of Vidacare Corporation.

80s]

Cliff Megerian (M.D. 1988) was named chair of the Department of



Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and University Hospitals Case Medical

Center, where he has practiced since

2002. He previously served as vice chair of the department and director of the University Hospitals Ear, Nose & Throat Institute.

90s]

Jeffrey M. Anderson (M.D. 1990) was appointed by Major

League Baseball and the MLB Players Association as independent program administrator of the Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program. In this role, he’ll be responsible for administering testing requirements, monitoring collection procedures and testing protocols, auditing test results and administering the Therapeutic Use Exemption process. Anderson is director of Sports Medicine and head team physician at the University of Connecticut, as well as assistant clinical professor at the school’s health center and medical director for research in the Department of Kinesiology.

00s]

Brita Roy (M.D. 2009) and **Hung-Jui “Ray” Tan** (M.D. 2007) were

selected as 2013 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars, physician-leaders who will lead the transformation of health and health care in the U.S. They and 25 others were selected from more than 90 applicants enrolled in medical and surgical residencies across the U.S. Roy, a resident in internal medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, will complete her fellowship at Yale University. Tan, a urology resident at the U-M, will complete his fellowship at the University of California, Los Angeles. The two-year fellowships begin in July. —MF