



**M**y daughter's artwork is displayed on my office walls: appearing there are random greens and golds, purple stars and blue hearts, pencilled-in puppies and brash crayon cats. One wall is primitive, decorated by a two-year-old; another is covered by her output at three. The last is a work in progress by a now-four-year-old capable of more advanced techniques. On this wall Doctor Daddy stick figures help sick patients get well. All of the Daddies are smiling and standing; all the patients are lying down on an examining "box" and smiling too. Sometimes a happy nurse is included in the scene. The stick-figure wall is the one against which the examining table is set. Thus all of my patients have my daughter's pictures to look at when they lie down. Female patients often remark on them, asking how old my daughter is; young children seem calmed by this evidence of another child.

They seem crude, but on closer examination my daughter's medical pictures show a fundamental knowledge of my work. My hands are often depicted touching my patients. At other times they hold pills in brilliant colours. In still others I point to large charts. Only one shows a hospital: a large, dark building with jagged windows under a blotchy orange sun.

The shared detail in all the pictures is the grinning. All that smiling has caused me to reflect on how much of my work is pleasant, on how much I want to smile, on how much I should smile. For though my daughter's version

of my work is idealized, she's on to something. I'm downright dour at work. Too many lab reports, phone calls and pages disturb my office rhythm and my mood. I do not smile as per her ideal; I frown instead.

Of greater importance, though, is the matter of how much my patients smile. Too much bad news, too much mechanized medicine and too many long waits compete for their dissatisfaction. They frown, too.

More than any review article or scientific breakthrough, my little girl's smiling pictures have caused a change in my practice. I now make a conscious effort to smile from the first moment I encounter a patient. The times I forget, I'm reminded by her pictures. The results have been amazing.

In just three months nearly a dozen patients have remarked that I appear happier. Some have noticed specifically that I'm smiling more. My office staff seem more humorous and playful. Medicine feels more rewarding thanks to a few facial muscles.

I affix each new picture to my wall with as much joy as before. The clumsiness of my daughter's earlier efforts is fading, replaced by a careful, more detailed technique. She's graduated to markers and now colours blocky clothes onto her stick figures. These days, though, I put each picture up humbled by the realization that my daughter at four knew something more fundamental about medicine than I did at forty.

— *Dr. Ursus*