

Episode: *Author Interview: “Stage, Cut, Investigate, Regret, Heal”*

Guest: Maximilian Schaefer

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Max Schaefer, a third-year student at the University of Missouri, Kansas City School of Medicine and the co-winner of the 2023 John Conley Art of Medicine Contest. He’s here to discuss his series of drawings, *An Empty Stage, One Wrong Cut, An Investigation, Regret, and The Healing Hand*, in the March 2025 issue of the Journal, [Regret in the Moral Psychology of Surgical Professionalism](#). Max, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

MAX SCHAEFER: Thanks for having me, Tim.

[00:00:47] HOFF: So, what’s the main ethics point of this series of drawings?

SCHAEFER: So, the main ethics point I wanted to focus on was the need for physicians to care for one another. Obviously, as physicians, even physicians-in-training like myself, our main goal is to care for patients. But medicine’s really hard, and it can be quite isolating at times, especially very difficult, very personal times, such as the loss of a patient, which is what I’ve illustrated here. And I wanted to make a note that physicians are the ones that know what physicians face. And being able to reach out, help each other through difficult times such as that, I think, is incredibly important in the profession.

[00:01:43] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for your fellow health professions students and trainees specifically to take from your pieces?

SCHAEFER: Sure. I think it’s important to start really early. Day one, we’re in medical school. Everybody is facing a difficult time. It’s stressful. Lots of exams. But it’s important to find those connections with people that understand what you’re going through so that you can be there for them, and they can be there for you. I’ve been very fortunate. I have a very good group of friends here, and we’ve been very supportive of one another. And I can’t imagine going through med school or facing a career without those type of connections in my life.

[00:02:34] HOFF: And if you could add something to these pieces or highlight a particular point to draw out, what would that be?

SCHAEFER: Sure. I focused, obviously, on the death of a patient, and I wanted the sort of crux of this to be from an error, which is, I think, one of the more egregious things that could take place during your medical career. But as I pointed out, there’s daily challenges in medicine. It

tests you in so many ways. There's exams, there's boards, there's challenging patients, there's challenging cases, there's personal struggles, and there's days when you just don't feel adequate. And there's— I don't mean to be all downer. It's an amazing profession, one that I'm incredibly happy to be a part of, and it's given me some of the greatest moments of my life so far. But it's hard. And although I focused on this one incredibly egregious example, I didn't want to undercut the daily struggles that people face in this profession and their need to help each other and be helped through any time that they may face. [theme music returns]

[00:03:53] HOFF: Max, thank you so much for being on the podcast today, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

SCHAEFER: Thank you so much for having me, Tim. It's been a pleasure.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.