

WRITING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

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Learning Objectives

- By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:
 - ▣ Describe how to correctly construct a letter of recommendation
 - ▣ Give 3 examples of evaluative language to describe an applicant's rank
 - ▣ Interpret a recommendation letter about both excellent and average candidates

NUTS AND BOLTS OF LOR

Rachel Bonnema, MD, MS
Assistant Professor of Medicine
University of Nebraska Medical Center

What to include?

- What do you want to see in a letter?
 - ▣ Knowledge/skill set
 - ▣ Professionalism
 - ▣ Character
 - ▣ Work ethic
 - ▣ Communication skills/personality
 - ▣ Sense of responsibility
 - ▣ Specific examples of how the writer knows candidate
 - ▣ Statement of fit between role and environment
 - ▣ A ranking can be helpful (...in my experience, top 25%)

Secret Letter-Writing Language

Rank Words

- ☐ Outstanding
- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Solid
- ☐ Appropriate for level of training

Red Flag Words

- ☐ Punctual
- ☐ "Generally had little difficulty..."
- ☐ "Seems to..."
- ☐ "Will improve with..."
- ☐ Often...
- ☐ Willing to do when asked
- ☐ "To his credit..."

Secret Letter-Writing Language

☐ Recommend with:

- ☐ Enthusiasm
- ☐ Confidence
- ☐ Pleasure
- ☐ Comfort

☐ Other impact words:

- ☐ Articulate
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Intelligent
- ☐ Observant
- ☐ Efficient
- ☐ Shows initiative
- ☐ Self directed
- ☐ Motivated
- ☐ Exceeds expectations

Letter Construction

□ Paragraph 1

▣ Who I am:

- Program director, clerkship director, senior faculty...

▣ How I know candidate:

- Ward attending, outpatient preceptor...

▣ In what capacity did I work with candidate:

- Did you observe them take history/physicals?
- Did you grade their written H&Ps?
- Did you follow them longitudinally in clinic?

Paragraph 1

I had the opportunity to work with Kate during her inpatient medicine clerkship month when I was her student teaching attending. In our medicine clerkship this is a special faculty member assigned as a dedicated preceptor to a small group of students. As such, I had the occasion to work with Kate for four to five hours per week, observe a history and physical performed, and evaluate all patient write ups. Thus, I have had ample occasion to evaluate her performance. In addition, as a clinician educator, I am involved in teaching students at many levels and have a broad knowledge of the range of student strengths and weaknesses across the board at our institution. It is within this framework that I recommend Kate to you with enthusiasm.

Paragraph 1

I had the opportunity to work with Kate during her inpatient medicine clerkship month **when I was her student teaching attending**. In our medicine clerkship this is a special faculty member assigned as a dedicated preceptor to a small group of students. As such, I had the **occasion to work with Kate for four to five hours per week, observe a history and physical performed, and evaluate all patient write ups**. Thus, I have had ample occasion to evaluate her performance. In addition, as **a clinician-educator, I am involved in teaching students at many levels and have a broad knowledge of the range of student strengths and weaknesses** across the board at our institution. It is within this framework that I recommend Kate to you with enthusiasm.

Letter Construction

- 2nd paragraph
 - ▣ Candidate academic credentials or accomplishments
 - “...**she applies her clinical information and medical knowledge with judgment and insight**. Her differential diagnoses and management strategies are always on target and appropriate. **She prioritizes her diagnostic contenders and generates a management strategy that is logical, cost effective, and covers all important issues.**”
 - “Julie is **extremely bright, has a sterling work ethic...** While Julie has done an excellent job in the outpatient setting working with our extremely diverse patient population, she has **thrived on the wards and particularly in the Critical Care setting. She loves taking care of the sickest of the sick...**”

Letter Construction

- 3rd paragraph
 - ▣ Contribution to community
 - ▣ Personal attributes, things you want interviewer to know
 - “I want to take a moment to comment on Amy’s contributions to the medical school community outside of the classroom. She has been an **active volunteer** in a number of community service organizations. She **served as the Co-Chair of the Women in Medicine student interest group**, is a member of...”

General Principles

- Make sure you have time
- Be on time!
- Get CV/personal statement
 - ▣ Ideally, meet with candidate
- Letter should be ~1 page
 - ▣ Proofread and spell check!
- Include personal anecdotes and give examples
 - ▣ Why are they caring? “...observed Lyndsay sitting at a patient’s bedside reassuring him about...”
- Set your candidate up for success
 - ▣ Give something for interviewer to ask about

Troubleshooting the Problem Letter

- If you can't write a great letter...
 - ▣ Can share a journey
 - ▣ Write “mediocre” honest letter
 - Consider putting interpersonal skills (3rd paragraph) as the 2nd paragraph if candidate was academically weaker
 - Discuss strengths and areas for improvement, note impressive improvements/response to feedback
 - Highlight previous successes (summa cum laude, honors student in college, research experience...)

Troubleshooting the Problem Letter

- If it feels uncomfortable or odd that you were asked...
 - ▣ They have no one else
 - ▣ They want your name/title
 - ▣ Consider asking them to write a draft letter

THE ETHICS AND LEGALITIES OF WRITING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Abby Spencer MD, MS
Associate Program Director
Allegheny General Hospital
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Drexel University College of Medicine

Ethical Aspects of LOR

- Why are you writing it?
- Accountability
- Responsibility
- Potential implications of a negative letter or one that is better than it should be
- Legalities

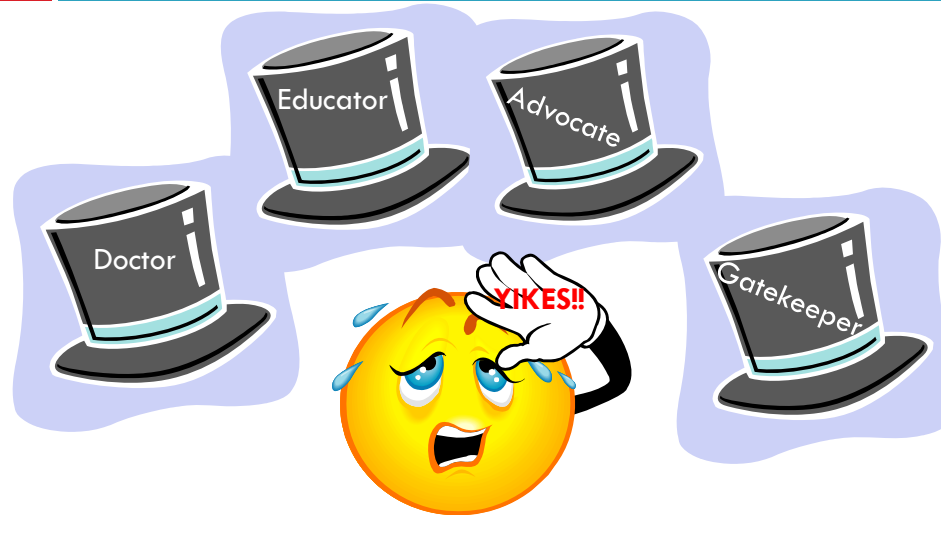
LoR: Why are you writing it?

- ☐ To help the individual get to the next level
- ☐ To augment a weak application
- ☐ To help your institution get its learners to well-known institutions/to advertise your institution
- ☐ To get your name out there
- ☐ Because you were asked and didn't know how to say no

Accountability/Responsibility

- ☐ Student/resident
 - ☐ Help your learner advance as far as he/she can go
- ☐ Reader
 - ☐ Provide potential employers/program directors with useful data to select the best/appropriate candidates
- ☐ Institution/recruitment
 - ☐ Help get your learners to the best places possible
- ☐ Society/Profession
 - ☐ Gatekeeper to patient safety
- ☐ Yourself
 - ☐ Honesty/Integrity
 - ☐ Your reputation

Letter Writer's Roles ...conflicting interests?



Vulnerability of Letter Writer

- ☐ You write a stronger letter than is deserved
- ☐ You give 1/2 truths or fail to disclose the whole truth
- ☐ You write truthful criticisms and fear repercussion
- ☐ You write untruthful criticisms and don't fear repercussion



QUIZ

- ☐ The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act applies to:
 - a) Residents
 - b) Medical Students
 - c) Fellows
 - d) a and b
 - e) a and c
 - f) All of the above

Students v. Residents

- ☐ The applicable laws differ if the person asking for the LoR is a “student” or an “employee”
- ☐ **Residents** are both *employees and trainees* but they are not students
- ☐ **Medical Students** are *not employees*

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)

- This is a FEDERAL law and applies to **students**
- Protects the privacy of student education records
- Gives students the right to consent to disclosure of any part of the student's "educational record" by the educational institution or one of its employees
- The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

FERPA Con't

- A letter of recommendation is considered an education record if a faculty member writes that letter, in his/her role as a faculty member, about the student's tenure at the University
 - ▣ Provides students with the right of access to your recommendation letters and their complete applicant file
- The majority of schools ask (some require) students to waive access to their letters of reference

FERPA Con't

- ❑ Once waived, the student has no right to review the LoR
- ❑ The fact that the student has made a written waiver should be explicitly stated in your LOR and the waiver itself should be kept on file
 - ▣ Without such a written waiver, the student will have access to LoR

Laws Applicable to Residents

- ❑ There are no specific laws applicable to writing LoR for residents (no FERPA equivalent)
- ❑ There are legal considerations to keep in mind
- ❑ Most programs or employers prefer the resident to waive the right to review their LOR

Legal Issues for Writers

- Suit against writer by trainee for defamation
- Suit against writer by employer for negligence

Can He Sue Me?

- Suit against writer by trainee for defamation
 - ▣ Most common basis for suit by disappointed applicants
 - ▣ Includes both oral (slander) and written (libel) false statements resulting in harm to the reputation
 - Providing recommendations orally will not eliminate exposure to suit

Will he win?

- Defenses to defamation include the truth of the statement and consent to its publication
 - ▣ Care should be taken to ensure that LoR are factually accurate
 - ▣ If you tell the truth (positives and negatives) you are protected
- Requiring a written request from the party seeking a LOR provides evidence of consent to publication

He Could Win If....

- A professor described his research fellow as a
 - ▣ “psychopath, very destructive, antisocial, son-of-bit#%, intellectually incompetent, immoral, liar, homosexual, and stated that he had made up all the data for his master’s thesis”
- These types of evaluations are not useful and will put you at risk
- Candid evaluations of student performance will be protected if they are made in good-faith

Stein vs Trazer 1962.
Irby and Milam. Academic Medicine. 1989

Other Legal Considerations

- LOR writers should be familiar with the implications of various federal statutes prohibiting discrimination
- References to race, national origin, religion, gender, physical disability, marital status, or age in letters of recommendation could raise employment discrimination or right to privacy claims

Other Legal Considerations

- For example, it would be inappropriate and ill-advised to state in a LoR that:

“For a 55-year-old non-traditional student, she has a remarkable academic record, particularly in view of her inner city background.”

OR

“Despite the external stressors of her girlfriend undergoing infertility treatment, she has maintained the utmost professionalism and dedication to her other 4 children and her patients”

Am I safer just writing a “vanilla” letter?

- You can be sued if you misrepresent a candidate or his/her qualifications such that potential harm could occur

- ▣ *Randi W. v. Muroc*

Maybe Not

- California Supreme Court:
 - ▣ “The writer of a LOR owes a duty to prospective employers and third persons not to misrepresent the facts...”

What do we Teach When we Embellish LOR?

- Misrepresentation of academic accomplishments by applicants for gastroenterology fellowships *Annals* 1995
 - ▣ 138 of 236 applicants reported research experience during residency in a U.S. training program
 - ▣ Research activity could not be confirmed for 47 of 138 applicants (34.1%)
 - ▣ Fifty-three applicants (22.4%) reported published articles, and 16 of these applicants (30.2%) misrepresented articles
- Misrepresentation of research publications among orthopedic surgery fellowship applicants: a comparison with documented misrepresentations in other fields

Seven “Cardinal Elements” of LOR

- A letter of recommendation should be:
 1. *Authentic* (based on adequate first-hand knowledge of the candidate's skills)
 2. *Honest* (accurate; avoid exaggeration or hyperbole)
 3. *Explicit* (avoid veiled omissions)
 4. *Balanced* (incorporate strengths and weaknesses)
 5. *Confidential* (avoid unnecessary disclosure)
 6. *Of appropriate detail and length* (content relevant to the institutional or individual requests)
 7. *Technically clear* (avoid unnecessary abbreviations and jargon).

Larkin and Marco. Acad Emerg Med. 2001

Honesty and Integrity

- “The implied duty to future students, colleagues, researchers, and patients who might come in contact with the applicant should motivate authors to write honest, explicit, appropriate, and complete letters”
- You are protected to do so!

Larkin and Marco. Acad Emerg Med. 2001 Jan;8(1):70-3.

If you don't have anything nice to say....

- Here are some ways to say it anyway:
 - ▣ Schall (2006) advises limiting criticism to one paragraph late in the letter, and phrasing criticism in an affirmative way
 - ▣ “Her teaching will improve once she gains a higher level of confidence.”
 - ▣ “His fund of knowledge will improve as he continues to read about his patients...”
 - ▣ I’m confident that her interpersonal skills will improve as she gains more experience working on a team...”
 - ▣ He has been very receptive to feedback regarding his need to work on.....

You Don't Have to Write One!

- It might better to suggest that the candidate find another person to write a letter, rather than write a neutral or unsupportive letter
 - ▣ If you do not know the student/resident well
 - ▣ If you have not had sufficient first-hand experience with the candidate’s professional interactions, knowledge, and or clinical skills
 - ▣ If you have nothing favorable to say about the student/resident
 - ▣ You feel you can not write an accurate or fair letter



SAMPLE #1

November 26, 2007

Re: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear Program Director

I am writing in reference to Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX who is applying for a position in your Cardiology Fellowship Program to begin July, 2009. XXXXXXX is currently a third year resident in good standing in our internal medicine residency at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. I have observed his performance very closely in my capacity as an attending physician on the medical floors and as the program director for the internal medicine residency at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXX overall performance during his time at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX has been truly superlative. His clinical evaluations from the faculty have been consistently in the superior range in all six of the clinical competencies. His fund of medical knowledge is outstanding. He is vigilant and thorough in his patient care. His judgment is superb. He is widely recognized as a clinical star in our program.

During his time at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX has also distinguished himself as being a leader in scholarly activities. As evidenced by his CV he has demonstrated tremendous academic attitude and academic aptitude. These scholarly activities have included notable poster presentations such as his presentation for the American Heart Association which was accepted in August, 2007 and his poster presentation at the Western Pennsylvania Regional American College of Physicians meeting in November 2006. In addition to his publications and poster presentations XXXXXXX has also actively pursued clinical research in cardiology during his time at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. As outlined in his CV he has been involved in multiple cardiac research projects. XXXXXXX has also distinguished himself as a teacher. He was recently awarded the Golden Stethoscope Award by the XXXXXXX University College of Medicine medical students. Given the fact that the XXXXXXX students are exposed to many outstanding residents in multiple medical residency training programs this is quite an honor. It speaks to XXXXXXX outstanding fund of knowledge and his ability to connect with his students.

While XXXXXXX has certainly distinguished himself with his clinical and scholarly achievements during his residency years I have actually been most impressed by his professionalism and his interpersonal skills. I have personally witnessed XXXXXXX professionalism on the medical floors on multiple occasions. I have been most impressed by his ability to deal with difficult patients and difficult hospital staff members in a mature and professional manner. XXXXXXX is always able to maintain his focus in difficult situations in order provide the best possible patient care. His interpersonal skills are outstanding. He is a great communicator with a great ability to make solid interpersonal connections. He is clearly the leader of our residency program. I am extremely pleased that he will be serving as a chief resident for our program beginning in July 2008.

In summary, I would like to give XXXXXX my highest possible level of endorsement for a position in your cardiology fellowship program. His medical knowledge, clinical abilities, academic attitude and interpersonal skills set him apart from his colleagues. He is the most qualified fellowship candidate that our program has to offer. If you have any further questions concerning Dr. XXXXXXXX please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully

XXXXXXXXXX has waived his right to see this letter under the “Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act”.

SAMPLE #2

September 5, 2007

Re: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear Program Director:

I am writing in reference to Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX who is applying for apposition in your gastroenterology fellowship program to begin July, 2009. Dr. XXXXXXXX is currently a second year resident in good standing in the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX internal medicine residency program. I have known Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXX both in my capacity as the program director for the internal medicine residency program and as an attending physician rounding on the medical floors.

Dr. XXXXXXXX clinical evaluations at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX have been consistently strong. He has displayed an academic attitude and a strong fund of knowledge. His interpersonal skills have been good and he has maintained a good level of professionalism. He has been active in scholarly activity as evidenced by his CV. He has presented an abstract to the regional American College of Physicians meeting on XXXXXXXXXXXX. He has also contributed to a review paper on XXXXXXXX during his time at XXXXXXXX.

In summary I would like to recommend Dr. XXXXX as a good candidate for a position in your fellowship program. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions concerning Dr. XXXXX performance at XXXXXXXX.

Respectfully,

Dr.XXXX has waived his right to see this letter under the "Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act."

SAMPLE #3

March 18, 2008

Re: XXXXXXXXXX

Dear Dr. XXXXX

I am writing in reference to Dr. XXXXXXXX who is applying for a position in your organization. Dr. XXXXX successfully completed his internal medicine residency at XXXXX in July 2007. His internship was successfully completed at XXXXX in New York City. I had the opportunity to observe Dr. XXXX performance closely as the program director for the internal medicine residency at XXXXX and as an attending physician supervising Dr. XXXXX on the hospital wards. Dr. XXXXX medical knowledge is very good. The program was recently informed that he had passed the ABIM Certifying Examination on his first attempt. His clinical judgment is sound and he is diligent and thorough in his approach to patient care. His skills in interpersonal interactions and communications are good and he generally had little difficulty in working with others. He is sufficiently reflective of his own performance and accepts feedback well. He worked well with hospital ancillary staff and was attentive to the social needs of his patient during his time at XXXXX. It should be noted that Dr. XXXXX was extremely well liked by the interns and medical students who worked under his supervision. In summary I have no hesitancy in recommending Dr. XXXXX for a position in your organization. If you have any further questions concerning Dr. XXXXX I would urge you to call me.

Respectfully,

SAMPLE: Annie Oying

Dear Program Director,

I am pleased to recommend Annie Oying to your residency program as a very good applicant. I had the opportunity to work with Annie during her Acting Internship where I served as her attending. Over the month, I observed her daily oral presentations of history and physicals that she conducted, evaluated her daily patient write-ups, and observed and evaluated her assessment and plans on work rounds. Additionally, I observed her skills in obtaining a history and physical at the bedside at least 1 to 2 times per week over the month. Thus I have had many opportunities to evaluate her performance.

Annie is a very bright young woman. She graduated *Magna Cum Laude* and Phi Beta Kappa. Her strengths are in her fund of knowledge and her ability to obtain a detailed history. Annie is clearly reading and studying medicine, and has an excellent knowledge-base of medical facts. Additionally, she presents very thorough medical histories and is able to obtain data pertaining to personal and psychosocial issues. She has very successfully mastered the “reporter” phase of the RIME continuum.

Additionally, she can generate a solid differential diagnosis that identifies most major issues of the patient at hand. Annie struggles somewhat in her ability to synthesize clinical cases and interpret the data she has gathered. She worked very hard over the month to improve her ability to apply her factual knowledge to patient care in order to formulate an assessment and plan. As she continues to learn to formulate assessments based on the data she has gathered, I think she will make a good internist. To Annie’s credit, she actively sought feedback, responded to constructive criticism and feedback with grace and poise, and never acted defensively or unprofessional. I do believe that she wants to improve and her efforts on this front should be commended.

In summary, Annie is a very nice young woman; she got along well with all members of the team and with her patients. She is caring, professional, and has an excellent fund of knowledge. She consistently does what is asked of her and she is willing to help out the team if asked. Annie is an avid runner with multiple other hobbies and she works very hard to keep a work and play balance in her life. She was an active teacher on the team and presented several short topic reviews to us. I believe she understands that she needs to continue to work hard to improve her ability to synthesize and formulate thoughtful assessments and plans so that she will be able to carry out the duties of internship effectively. She showed initiative in seeking-out feedback, and showed great improvement in her ability to organize and present her history and physicals.

Please note that Annie has waived her right to see this letter. If I can be of any further assistance to you in your selection process, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dr. Diddie N Tlikum

Asim Plakus is applying for a residency position. Asim has an interesting background in that he is an immigrant from a Middle Eastern country sent here as a pre-teen with his brother for political asylum. They initially stayed with family friends, but really have been on their own since their teen years. He was a graduate student in biochemistry and applied mathematics with a successful research career in using applied mathematics to help with hearing/speech pathology. His medical school course was complicated by multiple failures—he started 8/03 and will finish 12/10. Along the way he failed: Anatomy, physiology, microbiology, pathology, OB-GYN—all preclinical courses; he successfully remediated all of them. He failed Step 1 (184) and successfully passed on the 2nd try (194). He failed Step 2CK twice (180, 179) and reports recently passing it in October. He passed Step 2CS in August. His class rank is 166/168 but he has no red flags from reading his clerkship reviews/evaluations in his file. He reports some of his difficulties as being due to having no support outside of school. Asim underwent an arranged marriage in his 2nd year and his wife had “adjustment issues” which he states contributed to his poor performance. Also in his personal statement he reports a burglary of his home and a car accident which were difficult barriers for him and wife. Finally, he has recently been newly diagnosed with ADHD and is now medicated.

Dear Program Director:

It is my pleasure to support Asim Plakus in his application to your program. Asim has waived his right to see this letter.

Asim is an engaging medical student with a compelling personal story who has had continued growth during his Internal Medicine rotations at the University of Middle America. Asim has a background in biochemistry and applied mathematics and had done some interesting research in applied mathematics regarding hearing and speech. In his third year Asim had a solid performance in our Internal Medicine Core Clerkship. His attending noted that he had an overall performance above normal, that he actively researched questions regarding care without prompting and he had active and vigorous participation in the team discussions. He showed his continued improvement through a high satisfactory score in the Ambulatory Medicine/Geriatrics evaluation with his attending noting that he was "a superb student" and that he was very professional. His attending also noted that he was "a very bright and enthusiastic student, he is interested in Internal Medicine and evidently Endocrinology. He should be strongly recruited particularly to our program." Asim went on to do an elective in Endocrinology in which he received a superior grade. The Endocrinology attending noted that "XXXXXXX did an excellent job on this rotation. He has very good clinical skills, patient rapport and judgment. We enjoyed having him on our rotation."

Asim continues to look toward Endocrinology as a possible fellowship. He enjoys the practice of Medicine and the longitudinal relationships that he can develop with his patients. He has an easy going manner and I can see how the comments from his instructors regarding his enthusiasm, passion, receptiveness to feedback all manifest in our conversation.

In summary, I am pleased to support Asim and his application to your Internal Medicine training program.

Abe Livious, MD

Chair of Medicine

Dr. Willie Insultcha is a third year internal medicine resident who is applying for a hospitalist position in a local community hospital. Dr. Insultcha is a graduate of a US Medical School. His dean's letter on applying to your program painted the picture of a slightly above average student with no red flags concerning his personality or professionalism. His step scores were 210 and 220. In his first two and a half years of residency his clinical performance has been acceptable. His intraining examination scores have been in the 50th percentile and he does not project to having a problem passing his ABIM certifying examination. His rotation evaluations have generally placed him in the satisfactory to superior range for all six competencies including professionalism. On four separate occasions the program director received formal complaints on his behavior. Two complaints came from patient families who noted him to be rude and insensitive in a discussion. One complaint came from a nurse concerning his display of temper when a potassium level was not drawn on time and another complaint came from a nurse concerning his use of foul language during a call for a pain medicine request. All of these incidents occurred while Dr. Insultcha was stressed during overnight calls. On recommendation of the program director, Dr. Insultcha has been undergoing counseling for stress management. His insight into his behavior is reasonably good but while stressed he is sometimes unable to control himself. It has been two months since the counseling began and to this point no further issues have been raised concerning unprofessional behavior. You are now asked to write a letter of recommendation to the local community hospital concerning Dr. Insultcha's application for a hospitalist position.

Dear Dr. Smith:

I am writing in reference to Dr. Willie Insultcha who is applying for a position in your hospitalist program. Dr. Insultcha is currently a third year resident in good standing in the Pretty Good Hospital Internal Medicine Residency Program. I have had the opportunity to observe Dr. Insultcha's residency performance closely in my capacity as the residency program director and as a supervising attending on the medical floors. I am confident that Dr. Insultcha would be an asset to your hospitalist program. During his time at Pretty Good Hospital Dr. Insultcha's clinical performance has been quite strong. He has been thorough and vigilant in his patient care. His clinical judgment is sound. His fund of medical knowledge is excellent. He has a strong work ethic and gets along quite well with other members of the housestaff. He is certainly a team player. I trust that you will give his application your full due consideration and hope that you will call me should you have any further questions regarding Dr. Insultcha's performance at Pretty Good Hospital. Dr. Insultcha has waived his right to review this letter.

Respectfully,

Dr. Vincent Vanilla
Program Director
Pretty Good Hospital

Medical student case

Anna Ers is a 4th year medical student applying for IM residency. You were Anna's attending on wards during her 3rd year IM clerkship and also worked with her briefly in the outpatient setting during a couple clinics. You are junior faculty at an academic medical center (2 years since residency) and as a clinician-educator have multiple contacts with students during the IM clerkship. This is really the first time you are writing a recommendation letter, and have not seen many letters in the past. You remember Anna as a very good student on the wards—reliable, intelligent with good medical knowledge, and eager to learn. She initially had some difficulty with presentations, but improved during the month after working with the residents. She had a great personality and was very kind and caring with her patients. She easily developed rapport with patients and when you rounded, they often commented about things explained to them by Anna. You enjoyed working with her and think she will have no problem matching into a strong IM residency and would advocate for her to stay in your program as well. She got honors in the rotation.

Anna has done consistently well in her courses and is in the top 1/4 of her class. Looking at her CV, she is very involved in many groups in the medical school. In particular, she is an advocate for medically underserved populations has initiated multiple programs focused at helping this population including obtaining a grant from the AAMC to improve the health literacy of Somali refugees in the area.

Dear Program Director,

It is with pleasure that I recommend Anna Ers to your residency program. I had the opportunity to work with Anna during her inpatient Internal Medicine clerkship when I was the ward attending for the month. As such, I had the opportunity to interact with Anna for two to three hours per day on rounds. Prior to that, I had the opportunity to work with her for two half-day sessions in one of our internal medicine outpatient clinics. I feel that I am in a good position to evaluate students, because as a clinician-educator very involved in our third year internal medicine clerkship I have the opportunity to work with many students. It is within this framework that I recommend Anna to you.

She has a great fund of knowledge. We had a daily knowledge contest for the interns and medical students. At the end of the month, the medical student with the highest score received a prize. Anna finished in second place in a very close race. She is eager to learn. She seeks feedback and improves when it is provided. She plays an active part in case discussions. Her commitment to patients is unparalleled. She seeks to understand how illness affects her patients with great fervor. Anna's extracurricular interests in community service show this side of her personality as well. She is truly dedicated to the care of her patients. She always has their best interest at heart.

I recommend Anna for your consideration as a solid candidate. If I can be of any further assistance to you in your selection process, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please note Anna has waived her right to see this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sarah Bellum