

## It's Not That

By Katherine Guzman

The patient sits across from me. She comes for weekly injections. I go over the usual education points and review her care plan. Eat healthy, get enough exercise, etc. But something seems off today. She's quieter than usual.

"What kinds of exercise have you been doing?" I ask.

She lets out a sad smile.

"I'm sorry. I know what you're gonna say. I haven't been doing much exercise actually. It's really hard to go outside nowadays."

I try to instill a little optimism. After all, part of the job is encouraging patients. "Ah but we're expecting some good sunny days soon! It'll be easier to go outside in the nice weather, right?"

She looks down and sighs.

"No, it's not that. Every time I go outside, there is this group of gang members that stare at me and give me bad vibes. It's like they're watching me. One of these days, one of them followed me to my floor. They tend to stand outside my apartment building. We're planning on moving, but I just don't feel comfortable leaving my apartment when my boyfriend's not there."

I give myself a mental slap for rushing into judgment. I am reminded that I should choose my words better because sometimes our patients have a hard time with treatment compliance due to several socioeconomic factors.

"You probably don't know the area, but it's the apartments over there around the corner." She points behind me, signaling out the window. She says it in a way that means everybody should know to stay away from there."

Sometimes I find it funny how my patients assume I won't know where they're coming from. Because in that moment, I understand her immediately. I know *exactly* where she is talking about. I know *exactly* why she is saying that because I, too, grew up there. And eleven years later, the gang violence is still there, even worse. I look at this teenage mother in front of me, and I see so much of myself in her.

Nevertheless, I say, "Huh. I'm not familiar with that neighborhood."

It hits too close to home. It brings back too many unwanted flashbacks. And I have to move on to the next patient.

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