

Humans Taking Care of Humans

Category: Bravery

written by Sahiti Vemula | February 24, 2025

The patient dug her fingers into my palms, her grip so tight, yet slippery from the sweat. Tears streamed down her face. I could see her pain, from a place I couldn't fathom.

She'd come to us in the second trimester of her pregnancy. When we examined her, there was no sign of life inside her womb. The fetus had not passed spontaneously, so we performed a procedure called Dilation and Evacuation, or D&E.

As blood rushed through the suction, she surely knew that somewhere in the mix of that tissue was her dead fetus.

I know I didn't offer any medical support in those moments, but woman to woman, human to human, I just held her hand. For an hour and a half, I guided her through breathing, standing by her side.

At the end, I started to make my way out of the room, when she locked her misty eyes with me. She thanked me for being there and said she didn't know what she would have done without me.

This happened on my first night shift as a medical student on the obstetrics rotation. At first, my role was to hold the ultrasound probe over the patient's pelvis, to help the resident see inside the patient's womb. But then the attending physician took over the probe, and I went to hold the woman's hand.

I know this wasn't some huge accomplishment but, in that moment, I realized: *There is no other place I would rather be than holding her hand in this time of need.*

I hope to be the best doctor I can be for whomever I end up serving, and this experience reminded me that sometimes that involves expert procedural skills, but sometimes it involves a caring touch, or a listening ear. This experience also drove home the wisdom of the words I heard when I began my medical training: "We're just humans taking care of humans."

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