

# An Unwelcoming Room

Category: The Exam Room

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | September 1, 2025

I'm not sure which is worse: a physician's exam room or a dentist's office. An exam room is eerie in its silence, while the demonic whine of a dental office drill sends a shiver down my spine. But ultimately it may be the exam room, despite its potential to diagnose whatever diseases may be attacking my body, that scares me more. Its instruments evoke pain, its sterility the nothingness of death.

Two objects dominate exam rooms in my mind: the examination table and the computer. The table hurts my back and challenges my ability to get up once I am in a prone position; the computer hurts my soul with its message that medicine today is all about machines, not people. My primary care physician, a lovely man I have known for years, now spends more time communing with his computer than with me. He reviews my records, makes adjustments to my charts, puts in orders for blood work, etc. Meanwhile, I sit meekly on an uncomfortable chair, afraid to say anything that might interrupt his train of thought.

Standing in the corner of this unwelcoming room is a smirking scale—a piece of equipment that I try to avoid at all costs. I refuse contact with it, causing the nurse to write “uncooperative” in my chart when it comes to getting weighed. I do not want to know how much damage dark chocolate M&Ms have done to my waistline; I do not want to hear the doctor's warnings about weight gain or loss. Even the blood pressure cuff, which squeezes my arm until it's numb, promises to elicit bad results. My low-very low-blood pressure will surely lead to a reprimand about my failure to drink enough water. I agree with the diagnosis, but I know I will not change my lack-of-fluids lifestyle.

Still, it was in an exam room that my doctor discovered four lumps in my breast. It was there that he explained that my abdominal pain was due to a fractured pelvis, something an X-ray later validated. It was in an exam room that my strep throat and ear infection were diagnosed.

The exam room is a site that lives up to its name—it is a place of examination. But it is too much of a negative environment to bring me comfort, even if the exam proves that I am 100% healthy.

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