

Naked and Seething

Category: The Exam Room

written by Sara Ann Conkling | September 10, 2025

I should have paid attention to Red Flag Number One, which was having to provide my insurance information four times. Twice is normal—once when making the appointment and again when you show up for it. Four times is excessive; that was my first clue.

I also blew past Red Flag Number Two, which was the most dark, dismal, uncomfortable waiting room I'd visited in years. Patients were crammed into uncomfortable chairs with little to no space between them. Everyone in the room looked stressed and unhappy.

I was there for a skin check to make sure neither I nor my surgeon had missed any of the recurrent skin cancer that is a symptom of Gorlin's syndrome. I had waited months for this appointment. I contemplated walking out but did not.

Once in the tiny exam room, with its door opening onto a busy hallway, I met the dermatology physician assistant who would be doing my skin check. In thirty seconds it became apparent that she knew nothing about my illness. Red Flag Number Three. Why didn't I leave then? I have no good answer to that question.

I suspected that the PA also had no clue how to identify lesions, a suspicion that unfortunately proved correct. She handed me a paper "sheet" with no hope of covering any reasonable percentage of my body and told me to get undressed. She then left the room.

When she came back, she brought a male physician I had not met, nor expected. It startled me to have someone else arrive who I had to meet while almost completely naked. To make matters worse, the physician immediately began a hard sell on preliminary biopsies (something that means added pain to me) and the surgical technique he favors. For several minutes, as he took pictures and marked my body with a pen, I reminded him that I already had a surgeon and I was just there for a skin check. "With this number of lesions," I said, "excisional biopsy is the surgery I choose, when the lesion isn't amenable to cryosurgery." Thus came and went my futile attempt to educate the doctor about what it's like to have skin cancer surgery every single month.

Red flags now filled the room. Finally, I paid them the attention they deserved. "I'll call you for the next appointment," I said, knowing I'd never make that call.

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