

September More Voices: The Exam Room

Category: The Exam Room

written by Paul Gross | September 1, 2025

Dear readers,

When I think of an exam room, I picture the spaces I worked in during my thirty-three years as a family doctor. I picture walking into a cramped room whose stark surfaces and bare walls offered little warmth or hint of comfort. I imagine the major piece of furniture, an exam table, covered with a white paper that audibly crinkles at the slightest touch.

I picture the guest of honor, my patient—who surely does not feel like a guest of honor in these surroundings. They've been waiting for ten, twenty or thirty minutes—and sometimes longer—for my knock and my entrance. They seem a little dejected until they look up, and then sometimes, but not always, they brighten.

In spite of its stark furnishings, the exam room always felt like a sacred space to me. It was a place where a great mystery would be unlocked: *What's going on with this individual?* It wasn't always easy to tell from a patient's countenance, but I always hoped that hidden truths would gradually come to the surface—the source of a troubling symptom, a family member in crisis, or a confession about medications not taken, cigarettes smoked or sugary snacks consumed.

Even when there was no complaint—"I'm just here for a refill"—there was always a bit of detective work involved. *Well, let's just see how your blood pressure is doing. Do you ever check your blood pressure at home? When do you usually take your pills? Do you ever miss a dose?*

And over time, as my relationship with a patient grew, the dismal surroundings could fade away as a visit might become something of a mini reunion—*It's good to see you. It's been awhile!*

At some point, the connection could become as important as the blood pressure or blood sugar—and, to my way of thinking, perhaps more important.

I'll never forget when I went for my second or third visit with my own doctor. He entered the room, sat on his swivel chair, turned to look at me and said, "So how *are* you?"

Not "How *are* you?" but "How *are* you?" The emphasis on the second word made all the difference. I felt seen. I got the sense that he really wanted to know.

Did it matter that his exam room was no more luxurious than mine, and that, truth be told, the furnishings were a bit shabby? It did not. Not really.

Exam rooms are lifeless places—the crinkly paper, the glass canisters with the little army of tongue depressors, the ill-fitting paper gowns, the

electronic screen that steals attention from the supposed caregiver. And sometimes the annoying corporate notices on the cabinets: “We strive for fives!”

At the same time, it *is* possible to infuse these dull space with warmth, with kindness, with spirit and, dare I say it, with love.

September’s *More Voices* theme is [The Exam Room](#). What’s your experience of being in the exam room—as a patient, as a clinician or as a caregiver? What’s it like for you?

Share your story using the [More Voices Submission Form](#). For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month’s theme: [Awaiting a Diagnosis](#).

Remember, your story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you. And thanks for being a part of the *Pulse* community.

Warmly,

Paul Gross
Editor