

Icy Cold

Category: Hands

written by Paul Gross | June 1, 2016

“Your hands are cold.”

I heard these words throughout my third year of medical school, the year during which we first touched patients on a routine basis.

My hands *were* cold. I was nervous; how could I not be? What a strange experience for me—asking strangers to disrobe, then touching their bare skin.

It occurred to me that in examining others, I might also be uncovering something about myself. Maybe I was more shy than I’d realized? Or was it simply that my particular physiology made it harder for me to disguise something that all of us fledgling doctors felt?

The cold hands followed me through internship, another anxiety-filled year.

Now, some twenty-five years later, my hands are usually pretty warm. But not always.

When there are four patients waiting outside, getting more irritable by the minute, while inside the exam room I do battle with our electronic health record, trying not to forget my sweet, anxious patient’s prescriptions and blood tests, as well as the form that needs completing *today*, while she natters on about pain in her neck...her back...her foot, not to mention the fact that “...I’m not sleeping at all!”—it’s very possible that when I step away from the sink and lay my fingers on her bare flesh, I’m going to hear, “Your hands are cold!”

Paul Gross

New Rochelle, New York