

# Counting to Thirty

Category: Health Care on the Line

written by Eleanor Brown | November 20, 2017

I am with people when they are most vulnerable: in the hospital, stripped of their clothes, with nothing on but a thin gown that has been worn by many bodies before. My role is a constant balance between “human” and “robot.”

T-minus three minutes. The room is ready; the positions are assumed; the monitors are set. We stare at the clock as the seconds slowly pass, standing in silence to conjure up the stillness before the storm.

It is an inhumane act that no amount of training on plastic manikins can prepare you for: the anxiety in the room that is masked by delegations, the rush of adrenaline coursing through your veins, the assertive movement of your hands over the body, the crack of a fractured rib, the two possible outcomes rushing through your mind, the fear of failure, the fear of guilt. In these moments of performing advanced life support, I become part of the machinery that functions to sustain the breath and the beating of the heart.

While it is important to be an empathetic caretaker and predict the silent needs of patients, I have learned the importance of masking emotional engagement when caring for patients in critical situations that require precise medical attention, such as providing life support.

I hear the team rushing down the hallway and then the medic, chart in hand, yelling: “We have a sixty-seven-year-old male suffering from an MI, we have been doing compressions for seven minutes, he is unresponsive and we have not found a shockable rhythm.”

I take over the compressions for the medic and begin counting to thirty.

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