

White Coat to the Rescue

Category: Pretending

written by Colette Stanley | October 2, 2018

“Fake it till you make it”: this was my mantra many times during medical school and residency. Quite often along the way, when I put my white coat on, I felt like I was playing dress up.

One day in medical school, I was sitting with my attending in her office working on notes. Our medical assistant, Sharon, came to inform Dr. Dunn that our 11:30 patient was refusing to come into the clinic. I thought this was puzzling at first, but then I found out that the patient had severe dementia.

Sharon told us, in an exasperated tone, that two people had already tried to coax Ms. Quashie out of the car, to no avail. Dr. Dunn encouraged Sharon to try again. A few minutes later she returned and reported that Ms. Quashie was asking for Dr. Dunn to come for her. It was an unusual request, but because the clinic was so busy, that would be the last resort.

Dr. Dunn suggested that my classmate and I try our luck. We were both dressed in our white coats and I remember thinking, “I guess to the eye of a person with dementia, we could pass for doctors today.”

As we approached the van, I took note of the slightly panicked elderly lady sitting inside. Her nurse, who seemed frustrated, warned us not to touch Ms. Quashie before she gave us permission. Apparently, she hit . . . hard.

We approached with caution and explained to Ms. Quashie that we were doctors here to help. Relief spread across her face; it was so humbling. Like a child seeking comfort, she reached out to us and said how scared she was. We gently held her hands and guided her to the wheelchair. Her trust in our ability to take care of her was tangible. As I wheeled her inside, she kept thanking us over and over: for what, I am still not sure.

Throughout the years, my white coat has meant many things to many people. It's made children cry and given adults high blood pressure. This was the first time, however, that it served as a source of comfort; even if I was *just* pretending that day.

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