

Nobody Is Watching

Category: Sleep

written by Matthew Freeman | February 6, 2018

We were first to the auditorium, as I figured we would be. As fourth-year medical students, we were each on a mission: to impress residents and program directors so that we might ultimately obtain what had once been an abstract and distant thought: a job as an orthopaedic surgery resident. The conference wasn't to start until 6 a.m., but we arrived early, maybe 5:30 or so. Residents trickled into the auditorium, each casting a judgmental gaze in our direction, while we squirmed in our chairs being choked by our collar and tie.

Finally, the program director entered, and after casually filling his cardboard cup with hot coffee, the kind that makes you sweat in the morning, he walked over to us. We sat there, having only seen his picture on the website. He began talking.

He welcomed us to the school and thanked us for being there. Then, without much hesitation, he said: "There really isn't anybody watching you three so the rules of resident hour restrictions don't apply to you. In other words: Be around, be around often, and if you don't sleep, then so be it."

The program director assigned me to the sports service during which I observed countless procedures such as ACL reconstructions, shoulder, knee and hip arthroscopies. We were assigned to take call each week at least once and one weekend during our month as a visiting student. At most institutions, the day following a call day is an off day where you go home to rest up. But here, like the program director clearly told us, "there really isn't anybody watching you."

That month I discovered that the setting is just right during arthroscopy. For sleep, that is. After the patient is prepped and draped, the nurses dim the lights. Add to that the warm surgical gowns, masks and gloves, and you've got the quintessential environment for . . . a nice doze.

"Are you sleeping?"

Holy shit! It's the surgeon, and I've fallen asleep in the middle of a case! I'm terrified. Of what he'll say. And what he'll tell the residency program director.

Instead, he laughs hysterically. "Hey man, don't worry! Happens all the time."

*Matthew Freeman
Omaha, Nebraska*