Setting an Example

Category: Showing Vulnerability
written by Jennifer Hamilton | September 2, 2019

Morning rounds, on an August Tuesday. I've got two senior residents with me, along with two interns and a third-year student. We're working our way through a list of patients scattered across several floors of the hospital. Most of them we had met just the day before. And a few, of course, were added overnight.

Beepers and cell phones shrill together, letting us know that one of our patients needs attention. We run up the stairs and find the code team already there. The student watches the interns performing chest compressions, wanting to participate yet glad not to be called up.

Fifteen minutes, twenty. We're gathered around the nurses' station. My back creaks as I straighten to look at my trainees. The only private place nearby is back in the patient's room — and that won't do. "How are you?" I ask, looking at each one in turn. "Do you want to talk?" Scanning the group, I see only head-shakes and downcast faces. Someone mutters, "I'm fine."

"Well, I'm not fine," I begin. "I'm going to head into the restroom for three or four minutes, and have a cry, and splash some water in my face before I head back out. I'm going to have a better cry tonight, but I'm going to have a few moments to feel it now, because if I don't, someday I won't feel anymore. But I'll hold the beeper for anyone who wants to go first." Beepers are passed, tears shed, and the day goes on.

Jennifer Hamilton
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania