

Holding Space

Category: Uncertainty

written by Anjali Goel | November 29, 2025

The beeping of the monitor fills the silence as I stand at the bedside of my patient, a middle-aged woman awaiting test results that could confirm a devastating diagnosis. Her eyes search mine for answers I do not yet have, and in that moment, the weight of my new white coat feels heavier than ever.

The intern year has already shown me that uncertainty is not the exception in medicine; it is the rule. We live in the maybes, the let's wait-and-sees, and the not-yets. But standing in front of a patient, that truth feels unbearable. Patients come to us for certainty, and I am still struggling to find it within myself.

I can't give her the definitive answers she wants. I can't promise that the biopsy will be benign, or that her symptoms will pass, or even that the plan will stay the same tomorrow. But I realize that I can give her something else: presence. I pull up a chair, sit beside her bed, and simply listen.

She speaks of her fears, of losing her strength, of how her children might take the news, of the possibility of pain. My instinct is to reach for reassurance, to fill the silence with optimism or data. But I catch myself. What she needs is not quick reassurance; it's someone willing to sit with her in the discomfort of the unknown. So, I listen, nodding when she looks to me, holding the space her anxiety needs to breathe.

And yet, inside, my chest feels tight. I want so badly to make this easier for her, to take away even a fraction of her fear. I can feel my own heartbeat echo the rhythm of the monitor, a reminder that I am as human as she is: uncertain, vulnerable, afraid.

What amazes me most is her wisdom and determination. She tells me she will do anything in her power to fight this cancer, not only for herself, but for her children. It's not denial, it's love.

In holding space for her, I begin to hold space for myself. I give myself permission not to have all the answers. I acknowledge my fear and self-doubt but choose not to let them paralyze me. Instead, I lean into the human connection at the heart of why I chose this profession.

Anjali Goel
Minneapolis, Minnesota