

Embracing Vulnerability

Category: Healing

written by Tanushree Nair | February 18, 2021

Her voice trembled as she fumbled with the scrap of paper in her hands. *What did I do wrong? Is this the right prescription? Am I going to die?* The questions gushed from her all at once.

As a medical student on my first clinical rotation, I was still getting used to how to run these clinic visits. It seemed like no one was ever there for the reason originally listed, and somehow I always ended up with the long-winded patients that kept me in the room so long I was lucky if I made it to the physical exam before my attending ran into the room to take over. Any plan I had made to make this visit any different was quickly derailed when I heard the words: *deep vein thrombosis*.

I was transported back five months prior when my mother received the same diagnosis. She had a long personal and family history with varicose veins, but the new, painful swelling in one of her legs was new. I recalled the darkness of the ultrasound room, the feeling of holding my breath each time the technician paused to ask my mother a question, the unbearable waiting for the doctor's call, the hurried flipping through my medical textbooks for an explanation while cursing my own limited medical experience.

In my patient's case, getting rear-ended at a red light had landed her in the ER and routine imaging revealed an incidental but significant DVT that warranted treatment. She was discharged with a prescription for blood thinners and a million unanswered questions. Her fear was more than familiar to me; I pulled up a seat and said: *Tell me everything*.

Eight weeks later, I was on the final week of my outpatient rotation when a familiar name popped up: my DVT patient was back. As I opened the door to her exam room that evening, I was met with a bouquet of roses. My patient emerged from behind the flowers with a smile on her face. *From my garden, for you and the doctor. For making me feel safe again. I cannot thank you enough for your help*. She gave me a tight hug before departing, the kind that you remember and hold on for days to come. Its warmth is a constant reminder for me to always embrace vulnerability.

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