

December More Voices: A Ray of Hope

Category: A Ray of Hope

written by Paul Gross | December 1, 2023

Dear *Pulse* readers,

It was December. I was three months into my first year of medical school, and I wasn't feeling right. I'd been incredibly thirsty for the past few weeks and been peeing an awful lot.

When I finally decided to get myself checked out at the student health service, the news wasn't good: I was told I had diabetes. Not just diabetes, but type 1 diabetes, the kind they used to call juvenile onset. My body had stopped making insulin, and I would need to start injecting it.

Despite the fact that I was a medical student and that I had a cousin with type 1 diabetes, I had very little idea of what was in store for me. Would the needle have to go into my veins? Would this disease turn me into a shell of my former self? Was I going to die young?

My doctor put me in the hospital, where I was monitored and where I learned the rudiments of checking my own blood sugar with finger sticks—a new technology at the time—and injecting myself under the skin (not into my veins, thank goodness).

Many of my classmates, whom I was only just getting to know, were kind enough to visit me. In an attempt to reassure me about my diagnosis, one said, "It's not the end of the world," which only succeeded in making me feel worse—more alone in my upset about my new illness.

Another classmate, however, did offer a ray of hope: He himself had had type 1 diabetes for years, and even though we'd never spoken before now, he'd come to visit me because he wanted me to know that everything was going to be okay. He knew it. He'd lived it.

David taught me a few tricks that were immediately useful:

"No need to use a fresh needle each time you inject. You can re-use those needles. No, you don't need to disinfect them with alcohol."

"You also don't need to swab the bottle or your skin with alcohol."

"And speaking of skin, you can inject right through your clothes." (*What? Right through my clothes? Really?*) "I've been doing it for years and never had an infection."

Seeing someone who looked the picture of health and had been dealing with diabetes for a long time was enormously reassuring. His visit was such a gift to me.

That was thirty-nine years ago. And here I am.

One more story:

Three nights ago, I saw a patient in the office who has struggled to get his own diabetes under control—in part because he's undocumented and has no health insurance. He told me that he'd just returned from a month in Mexico and was now back at work.

I was curious as to how an undocumented individual would make it back into the US from Mexico.

Turns out that he was able to leave the country and return because he's now documented. His work authorization had finally come through, and he'd gotten a Social Security number. His green card is supposed to arrive in less than a year.

"Wow!" I said. This was huge. "When was the last time you were in Mexico?"

"Twenty-three years ago."

"Twenty-three years?" I let the weight of that sink in.

"I saw my parents. My father is eighty-seven, my mother is eighty-four."

Tears came to my eyes. Imagine if I'd had to do the same—leave home for twenty-three years in order to have a shot at a livable life. Or if my daughters had felt compelled to do the same.

Still, for this one family, at long last, after years of uncertainty, here was a ray of hope that life was going to get better.

This month's *More Voices* theme is [A Ray of Hope](#). As this holiday season gets under way, are you experiencing—or can you recall—rays of hope?

Share your story using the [More Voices Submission Form](#). For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme, [Traumatized](#).

Remember, your health-related story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you!

With warm regards,

Paul Gross
Editor