

POEM

Fears from a medical student part II: Prepping the patient

Veins replete with burning medicine, his eyes
shiver shut. Is it quite the same to call this sleep?
He's surrounded by masks, whispering and weaving,
cleansing his arms, piercing taut skin. A catheter
slithers into the anatomical pouch as the soft roar
of razor denudes his abdomen. The tape recruits
every last hair. Paintbrush to belly button, spreading
orange chlorhexidine across the impact line.
The man we know is gone, and in his place—
nine square inches of skin framed by tape and sheets.
The overhead lights turn on. "Time out!" All look up
for a moment and nod,
to show no wrong. To acknowledge
the tissue that was once our patient.
My face turns to the side.
We inhale the smell of seared flesh through our masks.

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Note This poem is part of a series of medical student perspectives in medical school, with the first poem entitled, "Fears from a medical student" (also published in *Medical Humanities*), which focused on the difficulty of end-of-life conversations.

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