

Poem

Stethoscope

She has wandered with me
 since my first days as a physician—
 an unassuming extension of my ears,
 gently slung about a tattered collar,
 patiently transmitting rubs, rhonchi, rales,
 as I struggled to decipher them.

She has sealed herself against unfamiliar skins—
 wrinkled, jaundiced, tattooed, inflamed—
 to magnify each breath sound and heartbeat
 of my patients.

I have squeezed her to the point of suffocation
 between my trembling hands.
 I have let her venture into the territory of blood-stained garments
 while I maintain a safe distance.
 I have dropped her to the cold, hard tiles
 in moments of crisis.

She has, with loving grace,
 been present for diagnoses
 that struck me to the bone:
 tamponade,
 heart attack,
 pneumothorax.

Her bell was the first to transmit the vibrant thump
 of a newborn's heartbeat,
 and her diaphragm the last to touch the breast
 of a dying mother.

She and I have united
 to triumph over the x-ray machine,
 to discover a heart murmur,
 to distinguish pneumonia from pulmonary edema,
 to comfort the distressed with a healing touch.

In the austere halls of this hospital,
 she has listened to my own heart pound
 over 100 million times,
 brushing aside those skipped beats,
 my moments of self-doubt.

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Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

Published Online First 16 February 2011

J Med Ethics; Medical Humanities 2011;**37**:57. doi:10.1136/jmh.2010.005520