

## 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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