

MIND TO MIND

*Creative writing that explores the abstract side
of our profession and our lives*

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

A Sobering Truth

Mark J. Lenart, M.D., M.P.H.

I

I watched a soldier die today.
As I looked at his body, I wondered about his life, even this morning.
Before it happened.
We met in the Combat Hospital,
A sterile island of healing amidst a sea of dirt and war.
Oxygenation, Ventilation, and Circulation.
All basic to life, yet here so...challenging.
Wounded by an unknown enemy
In a land where the battlefield is so...puzzling.

At first glance, his wounds seem almost trivial
But the longer I'm his doctor,
The more apparent it becomes that these are mortal wounds.
Technology, teamwork and resources, though limited in much of the world,
are nearly boundless here.
Yet, their abundance is not enough.

From the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Portsmouth, Virginia. mlenart29@gmail.com

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CDR Mark Joseph Lenart, M.D., is assigned to the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Portsmouth, Virginia, and was deployed to the NATO Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The views expressed in this work are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Navy, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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I consult with colleagues to gain perspective on my struggle,
Grasping for other ideas that might keep him alive.
He codes. The team flies into action. Drugs are given.
Orders are shouted. Chest compressions begin.
We pause. A pulse. A save.
But not quite.

Minutes later, the scene repeats.
And then again. And again.
The aroma of futility grows stronger.
Anxiety crosses the faces of those I watch.
Sadness spreads.
An inevitable end.
Oxygenation, Ventilation and Circulation.
Why can't he do it?
His wounds are devastating.
The pathologic physiology...irreversible.
Finally, the code is "called".
What a funny word - for a brave, young man has just died.
It is silent except for the beep of the monitor.
Someone reaches over and turns it off, too.
We have failed. You can see it on each face.
Yet none look another in the eye.
An audible weeping behind me.
So final.

I think about his family.
The sadness is overwhelming.
What good can come of this?
Perhaps there is none.

I watched a soldier die today,
But he did not die alone.
In this he has made me see that life is but a vapor,
And I resolve to live from this day forward
In light of that sobering truth.