

MIND TO MIND

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

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I'm looking into the mirror the night before Final Med Surgery exams. But it's a different face in the mirror as this time, 19 years after sitting for the exam myself, I am to be a clinical examiner.

So I examine...carefully investigating the white hairs poking through black at my temples and widow's peak. I make note of the wrinkles around my eyes and across my brow. I know the genesis of each line and smudge: long nights spent watching ventilators, monitors, urine output, blood pressure. The black news delivered to parents who wait with hope shining in their eyes. The mistakes made and the witnessing of their consequences. As the years ticked by, there were arguments over rosters, disappointments, exams, changing jobs, "home late again" excuses, more exams. More "home late again" excuses.

I feel fretful as I contemplate the role of first-time examiner in Final Med. But I am acutely aware it is not even the tiniest part of the anxiety that the students, on the threshold of graduation as doctors, must be feeling as they stand and look in the mirror tonight.

When peering at my reflection, I recognize the contentment, stimulation, reward, and challenge that have fueled my journey so far. Though there are battle scars, there couldn't be another life for me. This bogeyman, this Final Med inquisition, is the biggest thing that the students face—and yet it is the smallest thing. I want to take their sweaty answers, wrought with toil

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and tears, and hand them back to them. Before I hand them back their answers, I will pack empathy and humanity into the corners. And into each remaining crevice, I will stuff threads of self-understanding and self-care. Like a goose-down duvet, the soft filling will become the sustaining warmth inside the outer layer of knowledge and skill. Things I never knew 19 years ago but have an inkling of now.

Tomorrow this examiner will be kind.