

# MIND TO MIND

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

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

## The Hospital Gown, Medicine's Equalizer

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The hospital gown is medicine's equalizer.

No matter the wearer...

overweight, cellulitic diabetics

tachypneic pregnant women puffing forth new life

wide-eyed children breathing through an anesthesia mask...

all rendered into one

shapeless, ill-fitting smock.

Modesty

preserved by the garment of flimsy, patterned fabric,

sometimes by two in those with posteriors left bare by one stingy cloth.

Thus outfitted

shuffling in tread-treated socks

clinging to an IV pole for stability with one hand

gathering up the ample folds yawning apart at the seams in the other,

while scooting onto a stretcher *en route* to surgery.

Those too weak remain in bed

listlessly lying amid a tussle of sheets, blankets, of which the hospital gown becomes one of many layers.

The seemingly healthy defy this aura of illness,

but even the most robust bodybuilder's biceps seem a little more attenuated

capped by cheap cotton sleeves

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hulking quadriceps unused to public exposure  
 enjoy a kilt-like debut courtesy of the shortened gown.  
 Occasional glimpses of the individual peek through...  
 cartoon-emblazoned pajama fleece  
 comfortably bulky knit sweaters  
 a well-worn terry-cloth robe...  
 can break the uniformity of the hospital one-piece.

The gown is requisite hospital livery.

Clothing

voluntarily surrendered by the elective catheter patient who disrobes  
 trauma alert fresh off the slopes, ski pants cut off, wheeled to the OR to re-place dis-  
 placed bones

Flesh

must be exposed. Easy access  
 pulmonary percussion, abdominal auscultation, pulse palpation—  
 areas normally kept privy by favorite jeans, tattered t-shirts, and intimate apparel  
 now open for scrutiny.

The patient

clinging to individuality  
 behind monotonous bolts of faded cotton.

The doctor

will see you now.