Grace anatomy

BY ROBERTA M. BEACH

Every person in this room has already
Given one gift simple and profound:
Difficult to give, harder to receive.
For each life and death, information provided
Is limited enough to fold
Into one small square of gauze.
All deserve recognition. And yet ...
Stand at attention. Here. This man.
How he died is not what is most important.
His life? If you could only imagine.
The aorta, coronary arteries
Valves (cusped and semilunar), ventricles, atria ...
He would have taught everything
You need to know. And more.
How to tell a patient a test was false
Positive, a wife the situation is serious
But her husband should survive
A grandmother she needs open-heart surgery
And will be healed for her grandchild’s wedding.
Many times he entwined empathy, hope
And sorrow into handpicked bouquets
Placing vases in the angled plasma light
Of hospice windows, certain his blooms
Would last. For patients.
For himself. Always respect who he was
What he will teach you
And, if you play requests
Listen to Bach while you memorize
The vascular system.

Robert Beach is a cardiology administrative coordinator with M Health.

On what inspired this poem: “One of our retired cardiology professors died and donated his body to the University of Minnesota’s Anatomy Bequest Program. Several weeks later, during a conversation with a member of his family, I was asked what seemed to be a rhetorical question: ‘I wonder where he is now... physically?’ ‘Grace Anatomy’ began as an attempted answer. Having read about anatomy students and their complex reactions to gross lab, I also wanted to address these. Every physician who was involved in medical education and becomes an anatomy donor is not yet finished being a teacher.”