Being called
Reflections on becoming a physician

BY MEGAN SAN GIACOMO

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The scalpel flashes as mom yells in distress. I thought epidurals were supposed to work better than this, I tell myself. I try not to trip over my gown as I dance around the attending physician and resident. Blood splatters everywhere.

Everything changes for mom once the baby arrives and is scooped onto her chest. She couldn’t care less about the placenta or the bloody, messy laceration as she looks at the baby she waited so long for, worked so hard for. Everything changes for the doctors, too. We’re no longer listening to decelerations, coaching mom onto her hands and knees, or evaluating for that episiotomy as we run through the ABCDEs of an assisted vaginal delivery. Mom has been through pit, mag, cytotec—this baby must have wanted a fight. We clean up the mess, resurface the battlefield and enjoy by association the bewildered relief of this newly enlarged family.

Dad gets tears in his eyes the minute he sees his firstborn son. The resident interposes his gloved hand between baby’s belly and the father’s shaking hand as he gets ready to cut the umbilical cord. “What do you think of your newborn son?” the attending physician later asks him. “I don’t know,” Dad replies, after taking a long pause to consider the question. He can’t stop looking at his child.

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I’m nervous, overwhelmed and short on sleep. As I gulp my milk and tater-tot casserole, the resident joins me for lunch. Instead of commenting on the news or the weather, he asks me why I am going into medicine. This is the resident, itinerant from Duluth, who gave me a crash course in OB, sat with me to deliver my first baby, modeled quiet listening in patient care, and actually inquired about and learned names of the staff. I decide he can be trusted, so I tell him about the gynecologist I shadowed in Peru who loved medicine and feared God and genuinely cared for patients who had hopeless medical and social problems because he was called to do so. I recount that I too have been called, compelled by my concern for people and my love for God. He nods. The resident challenges me to not forget my calling and, despite my love for medicine, to keep my priorities in order.

I’m on the wards, with my stethoscope around my neck. I didn’t get here without a fight. I have been through rejection letters, cadaver lab, biochemistry and boards, but everything is different now that I have patients. I worked for this and dreamed of this for so long, and here I am looking at my patients, my new life in medicine. I feel inadequate, and my hand shakes when I use scissors. I return home with my pager and am not sure what I think about this device threatening to interrupt my life at any moment. Yet I know that I am not here by accident, and I am not alone. It took a resident interposing himself into the bewildering blur of my first month in rural medicine to help me remember that I’ve been called. MM

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