

# Gratitude

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Sometimes students can forget, in the excitement of learning, that each correct diagnosis has consequences for the person who receives it. "To a First-Year Medical Student," written from the perspective of a teacher, is about tempering learners' elation at acquiring new skills by reminding them that each human being is more than the sum of their physical parts. Themes include humanity, enthusiasm, respect, and appreciation.

## To a first-year medical student

Ambulatory patient number 1  
Was in today to be the lungs  
Where last week  
Her heart was paramount  
To the learning process

Beatific smile worn in assent  
(Should sainthood be conferred?)  
Allowing medical students to navigate  
The presence of her breasts  
To map the landmarks of her chest

And I teach *you* to preserve their dignity

And so the weeks elapse  
This patient 1 gives way to 2, then 5, then 10  
The last who on that day afforded you a knee arthritic,  
A varicosed leg, and a liver edge

Skills gained, skills reinforced  
Examinable first then practical, practicable  
But they departed, fated with their findings

Those rales you auscultated  
Succumbed to failure (of the heart)

The turbulence you palpated  
(The "thrill" that thrilled you!)  
Belied the fatal valve

The jaundiced eyes, you observed  
The wasted frame  
Was overrun ("gastric cancer" he told you, I know)

Many now deceased after years of being "the patient"

These lungs were his  
This heart was hers  
This kyphotic back  
Like so much scaffolding  
Around the history  
That you have taken/built, was wrapped

I want to say  
"Be rapt today!" because  
When all that knowledge gained is at your "clerking"  
fingertips  
You will (you must!) remember them

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**Competing interests**  
None declared