FROM THE INSIDE

Matters of time

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Since becoming doctors, we have grown to know the value of time—for ourselves, and for our beloved patients. Our lives and theirs are marked in the mystical hourglass of time.

We know that time goes by, relentlessly. As does the time we dedicate to our work, sacrificing hours we could dedicate to our other passions; and in these difficult days, feelings can only be amplified.

The passing of time is marked by events, resonating like the chimes of a clock.

A second sometimes makes the difference and we understand it at our expense. The seconds flow on the dial of our watches that envelop our wrists and beat synchronously with our heart. The seconds dictate the measure of our heart beat. And they seem to leap just when we want to grasp them in cinematic slow motion.

A minute can seem endless when things are not going your way. Having to explain to a patient that things are not progressing as you had hoped. Seeking comfort in their eyes for a choice you have to make, a choice you hope is the right one.

Just how long does time stretch a minute when things are not working out? When you are staring at that monitor, the data flowing through your mind. The green, the red, the yellow figures, flowing through your mind like a river in flood. You are seeking comfort in those machines, hoping they are on your side—on your side, on your patient's side.

You know in your heart how swiftly a minute can pass when you must choose a course of action. Seeking lucidity with swiftly dissipating mental resources, and then transmitting the chosen path to those around you.

All around and about you, these moments flow to the rhythm of time, marching onwards.

The slow drip of that drop in the drip. The rise and fall of breathing, slowing or speeding before your eyes. Heartbeats, amplified by the stethoscope, pounding in your ears.

Thinking of your time and the time of others. Minutes flowing through the homes of your patients' relatives, waiting for your call. Those minutes will be worth twice as much.

In those minutes, the words spoken on that call will flow like invisible threads linking them to their loved ones in an infinite network. Those minutes you will remember, and you will remember them too: a moment forever shared, time frozen as in a photograph.

And when at the end of the day the sum of all those seconds and then all those minutes condenses into hours you will start taking stock of your day.

Sometimes you will feel encumbered with the weight of those hours. Your mind will return to those hours you spent next to your patients' beds. You will think that weight will never be equal to the weight they feel on their shoulders after days lying there.

You will try to raise that hand once more and lay it lightly on their chest or on their shoulder. And you will think that those seconds and minutes and hours do not have to weigh on them what they weighed on you, because sharing this weight, is part of our vocation.

In the end, you will understand that the time you are devoting to the well-being of others will return, in forms you never considered.

As doctors and humans, we eventually will understand that it is all a matter of time.

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