

# MIND TO MIND

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

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

## “This Is My First Time” – The Way of the Fearless

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Anxiety of the *first* – the first exam, the first job, the first love. The jitters and the jim-jams, the collywobbles, the butterflies, the queasiness and the uneasiness of the first surgery.

Anxiety is a queer feeling, difficult to understand and even more difficult to express. It is a gentle word but a strong sentiment, a fierce feeling. There is always a fraction of fear in anxiety. The French call it *anxiété* and *la peur* (fear). It is *pavor* in Latin and *el temor* in Spanish. In English, the word *angst* conveys an intense feeling of anxiety, apprehension or inner turmoil. In German, *angst* simply denotes fear whereas *furcht* is an elevated synonym, which gives a negative anticipation of a concrete threat. For the surgeon who is operating for the first time, it would probably be *angst*. For the patient who is undergoing surgery for the first time, it may be *furcht*.

Entry into an operation theater complex is not without anxiety. Science has contrived against nature and created anxiolytics but nothing overwhelms the human mind. The transmission between the head and the heart is indecipherable, impenetrable and completely mystifying.

To lie on a table that is barely broad enough to hold you from left to right, from top to toe, can go up and down, or seesaw with a touch of a remote – does not make the choicest form of recumbence.

The ambience resembles a space station, one without a safe harbor. Multiple enormous lights drop from the ceiling, some shine from the sides, some even with cameras fitted on them to catch you in the most embarrassing moments.

The contents of this article are fictitious, not intended to harm the image of any medical relationship. The last two statements in the article are, however, real. That was indeed the author's first time.

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Aliens float about, or maybe they are our own crewmembers, dressed in greens, blues or pinks, their heads covered, their faces masked, colorful gloves on the hands, boots on the feet. The room is full of gadgets, screens and wires, quite like an air traffic control room of a busy airport. Music emanates from somewhere in the background, but no one seems to listen. Everyone is busy and everyone is doing something important. When you get a smile, you wonder what it really means. Is someone happy to see you or is it just polite sympathy for the inevitable?

And then you are reassured (remember you were reassured many a times before in the past, all before you finally made the brave decision to lie on this table). Before you buoy yourself up, you find someone putting stickers attached to wires on your chest, someone wrapping something on your arm, and, worst of all, a poke in your vein, not without a delusory warning. Remember, it is YOU who gave the consent.

But every misery has an end. As someone is ready to inject a milky potion into your body, with the promise of fine weather, the promise of the moon... you take a deep breath and plead, "Doctor, please, this is my first time."

"Do not worry, dear, this is my first time too."