

## Lauds

By Kristen Zeller

The sun sits on haunches just under the horizon, waiting to be revealed as the earth completes its next revolution. Throughout the hospital, teams have bustled through rounds; vital signs scrutinized, wounds examined, sleepy parents' questions answered, and plans made for progress toward discharge. My pager still sleeps at my hip but text pings on my phone have begun their daily acceleration.

Entering the operating room, the day has fully sprung. The mood is set by blazing overhead lights, walls papered with checklists, and monitors beeping out syncopated tones. Team members circle in concentric orbits around our little patient. The anesthesia team occupies the tightest orbit, placing monitoring devices, inserting intravenous access, and readying for intubation. Nurses count instruments and meticulously organize their table. The resident prepares to position the patient. Students hover in the most peripheral orbit, awaiting opportunities to place a foley catheter or nasogastric tube. The room falls still as the question is posed, "Are we ready for a time out?" We make our scripted contributions to this pause for safety, punching the ticket clearing us to start the operation. Having clarified our mission, the surgical site is prepped. Circular sweeps of the prep stick move as if following a labyrinth from the umbilicus to the outer reaches of the flanks.

Once this is done, I step out of the room and have my own pause. Removed from the hustle of the operating room, and with my back to the commotion of the corridor, I face the wall-mounted basin and begin my own prep. My clog flicks the faucet foot pedal and the cold water meets my hands. I feel my breathing decelerate and deepen, followed by the slowing of my heart rate. I straighten my spine and release the tension in my shoulders. I soften my knees and feel the pull of the ground under my feet. My thoughts drift toward the operation. I mentally rehearse key steps and anticipate challenges. I enumerate the sutures I will need—PDS, Vicryl, Monocryl—and inventory the instruments I want at hand.

I'm pulled back into my body by the sensation of the cold wet tumbling over my fingers, hands, wrists, forearms, and elbows. I move the soap and water from distal to proximal, moving nearer to my center. Recalling the waters I can't remember that washed over my head at the font as an infant, the repetitive, cleansing strokes of the scrub brush remind me that my need for renewal is perpetual. My hands continue to function independently while prayers ascend. I pray for the skill to find the right tissue planes. I pray that I will have the wisdom to keep my patient safe. I pray that I will have the patience and insight to engage the learners. I pray that I will be able to recognize my own shortcomings and make myself equally receptive to learning. I pray that I will have the composure to lead the surgical team with humility. I rinse in three motions under the faucet, washing away the chlorhexidine in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One more deep breath . . .

Amen.

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