

Notes

Up from the minors

Powder flew into the air as the size 7-and-a-half latex glove snapped snugly onto my right hand. I jockeyed sideways, turned and then sunk my left hand into its awaiting outstretched glove. The scrub nurse's blue eyes floated about her surgical mask, drifting north, south, east and west as I stepped carefully backward, raising my gloved hands high into the air.

After what had seemed like years of tailing interns and residents down the halls of the surgical wards, my OR time had finally come.

"We've got a big case on tap for tomorrow, 7 am sharp," said Dr. P, the staff surgeon. "It's a free muscle flap transfer with microvascular repair and skin grafting. I'm goin' to need lots of hands."

He looked over his team of house staff and peered deep into the bench. "Kevin, could you scrub in with us tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, doctor, sir," I had replied, sounding as confident as any veteran benchwarmer can.

So there I was, 5:45 am, putting on green pyjama-like surgical pants, shirt, cap and booties. I'll admit I did recognize that I was a tad early when the cleaning staff let me in, but I was determined to be ready for 7:00 am sharp.

One, two, three, four ... I counted out serial sets of tens as I scrubbed each section of my arms, wrists, fingers and nails. The rough brush and foaming iodine soap left my arms and hands tingling as I stood fantasizing about a distinguished career in surgery: maybe even being the next Norman Bethune. As I scrubbed away every dead squamous cell from my fingertips to my armpits, I quietly thanked that no-nonsense charge nurse who had explained the procedure so well back in second year.

At 6:15 am I successfully completed my morning scrub. I took a step back from the large white sink. I reached

down with my glowing pink hand and shut off the water tap. Oh, that wasn't good. I just contaminated myself. Although tempted to ignore this small breach of protocol, I couldn't imagine beginning my surgical career on such a sour note. So, I broke open another sterile scrub pad, stepped on the foot pedal, squirted a full load of iodine onto my arms and hands and started all over again with my serial tens.

6:30 am. This time I kept my hands high in the air, and carefully shut off the water with my knee cap. I backed gingerly away from the sink and stood there dripping while I waited for the nurses to arrive to the OR.

At 6:40 am, I back-stepped in through the swinging OR door and two-stepped until I was directly in front of the scrub nurse. The brightly lit surgical room smelled of cleaning bleach as the nurse arranged an assortment of needle drivers, scalpels, mosquito forceps and retractors onto the sterile surgical tray.

"Now, who are you?" she asked as she raised her masked face.

"Kevin Pottie: senior clinical clerk working with Dr. P. He told me he needed me to scrub in with him today."

"Oh, did he?" she said, more with her big blue eyes than her voice. She waltzed over to fetch me a sterile towel to dry my hands.

"Towel won't be necessary," I said wiggling my air-dried fingers. Before I knew it she had me slipping into a sterile green gown and pirouetting to allow her to tie the little cotton straps around my waist.

"Size?" she asked.

"Medium," I replied, conditioned by coffee at Tim Horton's.

"Surgical gloves don't come in medium, my dear."

"Oh. Right. Then give me a 7-and-a-half."



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So there I stood at 7:00 am: masked, gowned and with gloved hands held high in the air, ready for the strictest infection control. While the scrub nurse chatted with the circulating nurse about some episode of *General Hospital*, I used my time to mentally rehearse my anticipated work with the retractor and daydream about my bright future in surgery.

Finally, at 7:15 am, an un-scrubbed Dr. P peeked in through the OR door. My raised arms feeling like dead weight at this point. "Oh. Kevin. Glad to see you're all ready to go. We've got a few minutes. The patient is just arriving." He cleared his throat and swallowed slowly. "How 'bout we go for a coffee?"

And, well yes, in case you were wondering, after the coffee I never quite made it back to the OR. Instead, I was sent to handle some urgent calls back on the wards.

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