The White Coat- A Vow to My Future Patients

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The massive responsibility to which I have agreed, when we both sign our names in a contract, when I adorn myself in the white coat of my profession- legal, moral, and even spiritual obligations are promised. The ritual of assessment, examination, and diagnosis provides the foundation for the moral and legal binding of our two lives.

to have and to hold, from this day forward…

You agree to show me intimate aspects of your life- even those most close to you may never know, may not see. You tell me mistakes you have made, past injuries, memories behind scars, and worries for the future. You expose your mood, describing how the workings of your brain are expressed by your body. You reveal this to me simply with your presence but also through your voluntary words and actions.

for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer…

Our interactions are compensated but they do not depend on money, on insurance, on socioeconomic status- they are your right, and my responsibility. You are not to be denied your basic human right of health. You who come to me when things are fine, just a checkup and when things will never be fine again, that diagnosis I dread making.

in sickness and in health…

You bring your body forward for evaluation when you are called- for a school-form or a symptom that you’ve only heard about. In the end, I take what I have gathered from your history, the histology of your tissues, images of your body taken with our most advanced technologies, and finally your physical exam. I plug them into algorithms that I have diligently memorized during years of schooling and I make something unique for you. And I continue to use this diligent process to assess you, each time I see you, throughout your life.

until death do us part.

The fact, most shocking, that I have learned to accept about this profession- the death that lets me study what’s left, the way specimens are set in formaldehyde and plastic- but also the moment before death when you come to me, even when there's nothing I can do. Like a marriage vow, I promise you- by the touch of my examination, by the prescription of my pills, by the embrace of your loved ones afterwards- I am still here with you.