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## People in White

**D**octors and other health care workers bring to mind images of men and women in white, even today when green or blue scrub suits are frequently worn outside of the operating room. Indeed, attending physicians don white coats when seeing patients in a hospital or office setting. Even physicians who do not directly treat patients, such as many nuclear medicine physicians and radiologists wear white coats also. The white coat is a uniform, a recognizable sign of who we are.

In addition to allowing freedom of movement in a hospital setting, there is a certain aura about the white coat that comforts the sick, awes visitors and frightens pediatric patients.

The man or woman in white, the doctor, the purveyor of miracles is here! Everything will be all right! At least that is the way we (physicians, other health care workers, and patients and their families) all would hope that it works. It is clear that the mystique of the white uniform brings comfort and hope.

It is also part of the dismay experienced by physicians and nonphysicians alike when a physician or a physician's family member becomes a patient or, even worse, has a bad outcome.

"How could this happen?" we ask ourselves. If we're providing all of this knowledge, care and technology to others, aren't we able to drink directly from the well, the source of health? Somehow we are expected to be able to avoid the problems that befall ordinary people. It is as if we expect that we can discount the amount of disease that we or our family members might have in the same manner that an employee in a retail store can purchase the goods sold there at a discount. The doctor is supposed to be resistant to illness and mortality. He or she is expected to be able to protect loved ones. It would be wonderful if that were the case.

At times, we probably share the belief that we are invulnerable ourselves and also all-powerful protectors of those close to us. We move amongst disease seemingly impervious to it. Of course, now we wear gloves to protect ourselves as well as the patient. Nevertheless, we cannot help but feel insulated from disease. Other people are ill; we are not. We are the healers; we represent health. We are surrounded by the ill and injured daily, but we are intact, able to walk amongst the sick, providing care and offering hope while we are dressed in our white coats.

This is not noted with disdain. Through my recent interaction with the health care system from the other side of the white coat, I have come to appreciate these people, these men and women in white. People in other professions and occupations spend their days far removed from the pain, suffering and anguish that we in the health care profession deal with every day. No doubt there are stresses in those jobs too, but there is not the constant reminder of the fragility of the human condition. There is indeed a nobility amongst those who daily put a white coat or white uniform on their very human body and spend their years providing care to the sick and comfort to the families, with or without awareness of their own vulnerability.

**Stanley J. Goldsmith**

Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*  
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