How Gross Anatomy Changes You Forever

After a week of medical school orientation, followed by two weeks in the classroom studying cellular organelles and biochemical pathways, our class was finally going to start the centuries-old rite of passage that is human gross anatomy. For many students, it will be first time seeing a dead body. The anatomy lab is where future surgeons will make their first cut with a scalpel, without the pressure of life and death. It is where the ability to visualize organs and spatial relationships within a living body will be honed. It is also the place where medical students begin, for better and for worse, to become desensitized.

On the morning of the big day, professors lectured us, trying to prepare the class to walk into a cold room full of 30+ dead bodies. We were shown pictures of cadavers, videos on proper dissection techniques, and given rules and regulations of the cadaver lab. However, as is often the case, hearing about an experience is not quite the same as living it.

Our first round in the anatomy lab was smartly scheduled in the afternoon, hours after lunchtime. Although most students claimed to be excited (only one friend admitted to being hesitant about the whole thing), the locker rooms were very quiet. Before every laboratory session we use this locker room to change into scrubs, white coats, and close-toed shoes that will end up so stained, and smell so strongly that they will never be worn anywhere else. After changing, it is only a short ride up the service elevator to the cadaver lab.

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