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I was once asked by a nursing student what I enjoyed most about the nursing profession. After much thought, I came to the conclusion, what I enjoy most is washing faces.

We live in an era of fast food, fast care, and fast contact. When working with a patient that is ill, you share in the intimacy of their most physically and emotionally painful time. We share in their vulnerability and provide the nurturing care that can not be dispensed by a machine, a procedure, or a drug. We, as nurses, can wash away tears, help carry the emotional burden, and enjoy the personal attachment that is palpable when we share ourselves and our talents with our patients and their families.

There is nothing more rewarding than bringing comfort to a person in pain. I may fly in a multimillion-dollar helicopter, be able to place invasive lines and airways, titrate an assortment of medications, and operate complicated medical devices. However, without the ability and the willingness to develop an emotional connection with my patients, all of the care I provide may be seen by the patient and their family as no more than that of a technician pressing buttons on command. It is the willingness to share in the basic human emotions that separate us as nurses from our patients.

We wash faces.