Twitter Thread by Sayed Tabatabai, MD



Sayed Tabatabai, MD
@TheRealDoctorT

There are always questions at the end of the visit.

It's only natural. Nobody remembers everything. I'm used to clarifying and reiterating.

But your question catches me off guard.

"Did you know that hummingbirds remember every single flower they've ever visited?" 1/

I smile, and shake my head. "No, I didn't know that."

You nod at me, "Well, it's true. I'm gonna send you a bill now."

I laugh, and the layered masks muffle the sound.

I was consulted because your kidney function is dropping.

Clear yellow urine now turning dark amber. 2/

Your room is on a COVID unit.

The plastic sheets you have to zipper yourself through. The cool hiss of the air flow. Donning and doffing.

There was a time when this was a pulse-quickening ritual, when adrenaline would flow.

Now it is a necessary nuisance.

Numbing. 3/

Every time I see you, the visit finishes with an exchange of trivia.

You tell me something I didn't know.

I try and tell you something equally interesting.

It's a sort of game. A challenge.

I realize that it's something I'm looking forward to, every day.

A little joy. 4/

Late in the evening, when I get home, I sit down with some books and skim through for interesting tidbits I could use.

"Schott's Original Miscellany" is a godsend, as is The Guinness Book.

I enjoy the peace.

No screens. No one monetizing my attention.

Just pages turning. 5/

"Did you know Bluetooth is named for a Viking king, and the symbol is his initials in runic form?"

"Did you know a group of ferrets is called a 'business'?"

"Did you know in Japan they have cube-shaped watermelons?"

"Did you know M&M's stands for 'Mars' & 'Murrie'?" 6/

Every time I see you, I'm well-prepared with a piece of trivia, and you always have some obscure fact ready.

I never ask you where this pastime of yours started. I just go with it.

It makes you smile.

And it makes me smile too.

At least for as long as life lets us. 7/

The last time I see you is a Friday. You're more tired than I remember you being.

I don't remember the piece of trivia I share with you. Perhaps something about Scotland.

For the first time, you don't have any trivia for me.

You just thank me for taking care of you. 8/

I never see you again.

When I come back to work after my weekend off, your name isn't on the list.

This happens with numbing regularity in the age of COVID.

Still, I hope.

I hope you got better, that you were discharged home.

That you're enjoying trivia with your family. 9/

But when I look you up, I see the dreaded pop-up window that sounds unreasonably cheerful in my head.

"This patient is deceased!"

And I just sit, and feel the color drain from my vision slowly.

Did you know, 428,000 people have died from COVID-19 in America?

Do you know? 10/

As death lingers in the hallways, and steps into the rooms, I think of you.

I remember you, and your trivia questions like flowers.

Like a hummingbird, I remember every single one.