What I carry – by Pam Adelstein

When I greet my patients and enter the exam room, they see me, Dr. Adelstein, dressed nicely, with slightly unconventional nose and multiple ear piercings, stethoscope around neck, smile on face, ready to hear their concerns and help the best that I can. What they do not see is all that I carry with me when I am at work.

I carry my children. K, whose texts come up under the name of kxxxx with a red heart next to it, so that even when she is upset or asks a particularly needy question, I feel like she is sending me love. E, who as a teenager, makes a million plans, but then changes them seconds later, and texts me all about them. I have the keys. And am the gatekeeper.

I carry my husband, who usually does not need much at work, but often I need to consult him about some sort of logistics. And every so often there is a little something.

I carry my babysitter, who makes my life function, and without her everything falls apart. All for the price of $20 per hour. Her work in a school makes her prone to all sorts of illnesses, and availability can change in an instant.

I carry my faith. I am a Jew. My patients are of other faiths. I am mysterious to them as a Jew, and they ask me questions, and I answer, their token Jew. I also carry my worldview as a Jew – my values, my sense of time, my dietary habits, my scheduled days off. I carry my responsibilities within my minyan – my Jewish community to which I belong, and in which I take leadership roles.

I carry my extended families- mine and my husband’s. Who can call or email or text at anytime. And then the other shoe drops… I am the medical consultant for them all. And they are all aging, growing frail, and a little less reasonable with time.
I carry my friends and neighbors who reach out for help during the day, who have exciting events and difficult challenges, who are hurting and in need, and who are giving and supporting me. Remembering to check in with them as needed.

I carry the juggling of daily life – the endless tasks, errands, appointments. The thinking through the schedule, anticipating who will need what, when.

I carry my colleagues – my less empowered medical assistants who are so crucial to our work, our nurses who also make our unit run, the residents who work so hard, suffer from imposter syndrome, and are trying to figure it all out and who are giving and are exhausted. And also my dear colleagues, who have ups and downs of their own. I try to always have their back, to reach out a little bit extra, to help cushion their day to day challenges when I can.

I carry other patients. Those with whom I struggle, and those who I can give pure love. Those whose lives are teeter tottering in the wind as they try to have stability in their home, work, family and health. Those who are so ill, suffering from chronic and acute illness, those about whom I worry, sometimes even subconsciously. Those for whom I feel responsible. And those whom I inspire, and those who inspire me.

I carry my past. Growing up without enough money, with anti-Semitism, not knowing where I fit in. Seeing struggles around me. Reading for comfort. Being teased about being not looking or being like everyone else.

I carry my present. My home in Newton, my belonging to several communities, being a leader in many of them. My cozy home, all that we need – modest for Newton but luxurious for most of the world. Wanting what we have. Not needing much more. My yoga practice which keeps me grounded. My healthy eating, my quest for balance, my need for the outdoors, my searching for meaning and explanation of how the world works in books, my introverted self which surprises everyone who imagines that I am an extrovert because being with people connects me and also fuels my soul, but also tires me.

I carry myself. My desire to heal and make it all better for everyone – to fill up a hole in my heart and soul that still needs to be filled. And now I spend my life trying to be the most ethical and moral person I can be to repent in some twisted way for the world not being enough to save all of the women whose mothers were not enough.