Introduction: Hope everyone is doing okay as we approach the holiday season. It has been a challenging time for most due to the tridemic, staff shortages, and so many other personal reasons. In the spirit of offering thoughts about pursuing wellness, I share with you a piece from Anita Kostecki, a graduate of the Family Health Center for Worcester who now works at Boston Medical Center (BMC). She read this reflection at this fall’s MedMoth and introduced it by noting the following:

*Ever since I was a medical student in the late 1980s, I have used swimming as a stress reliever. I almost religiously always go to swim post call, now in the mornings, but I used to do it even in the evenings, when we worked all day post call (would sometimes need to take a power nap in my car to make that work lol). In fact, until clinical clerkships as a 3rd year medical student, I used to use running as a primary form of exercise but once I started on the wards, my feet would ache so much if I ran after standing/walking all day, I decided to switch over to swimming. I took an adult stroke class from a older nun who taught at the YWCA near the Worcester Public Library and then never looked back. The most trouble I ever got in as an FM resident was when a pediatric attending reported me to our residency director (Jim Pease) because he accused me of leaving too early post call “to go swimming” but to this day I think he was just jealous and that I left at the correct time....at any rate, swimming has been a blessing in my life and always helps me to re-orient back to the outside world after a call night when things go on that I imagine most regular folks would never even consider possible!*

As an avid open water swimmer who also took a course as an adult from a mindful swim master, I concur. See what you think after reading her poem.
Post Call At The YMCA

By Anita Kostecki

It is startling, the way that life outside appears after a long overnight call

Startling, the shine of bright morning light, when emerging from windowless workrooms
Startling, how cold how moist how fresh the air feels, walking out of dry stale spaces
Startling, to watch fast moving traffic as it races by, on a long sleepy drive home
Startling, that the rest of the world wakes up different, than the unslept one feels

Entering the familiar space of the women’s locker room, achy with fatigue in full tow
Rejoining normalcy, with a careful regard that elevates the ordinary into sharp relief

Pinched-in edges of sloped bellies, emblazoned with scars from lives of bearing
Bearing heavy work, bearing offspring, bearing more than can be spoken

Shiny oils highlight the strength of skin now closed, after necessary cutting open
Cutting open to free stuck babies, to get tumors out, to leave tired organs aside

Gaze creeping up from naked midriffs to strong creased faces, briefly lax for a few moments
Moments of rubbing sore muscles, stretching cramped feet, easing the tensed body

Smells of soap lathered on curves, of cream smoothing rough edges and irritation
Irritation from shaving in sensitive places, from exposing the self to unceasing demands

Varied languages infusing the common space with an occasional exchange of polite greetings
Greetings more animated with FaceTime friends, their images blurring the “No Cell Phones” sign

All with background music from a clear resonant voice in the shower singing
Singing loudly to her God with unshaking faith, exalting a life lived with great effort

How reassuring that resilient beings continue on in this way, that healing happens in spite of us

Us who push with women delivering their children, who sew them up when they are bleeding
Us who feel the warmth of fluid gushing on hands, lifting up a crying or limp baby human
Us who inspect the inside of orifices, of soft parts that need repairing, reinforcing, removing
Us who bow our heads and shed tears, bearing humble witness to fathomless pain and joy

The dive into cold water equally astonishes then soothes, as steady strokes stretch out
Stretch out the body and the mind the way overnights do, pushing us beyond
Beyond where others may go, but still always needing them
Needing them to show us the way back from where we have been
Keywords: swimming, stress, wellness