

Matrix Lesson 39

Cancel this case!

I never park in space #13 or #113 in the physicians' parking lot. I never play blackjack at a table with a dealer whose first name begins with "L." I never board a plane before knocking twice on the fuselage. I never watch a Red Sox game unless my father's 1973 copy of *What's the Matter with the Red Sox?* is by my side.*

Which is why I never proceed with a case if there is any intimation that things are not just right.

Some examples:

- A 69-year-old executive arrives for an outpatient hernia repair. He is seen in the pre-operative holding area where he states to the surgeon: "Things don't seem right."

* Hirshberg A. *What's the Matter with the Red Sox?* New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973.

- A 28-year-old female arrives on the 15th of the month for a laparoscopic cholecystectomy. She states: "You know, fifteen has always been an unlucky number for me."
- An 83-year-old male with a colon lesion arrives for a colectomy after a bowel prep. He states: "I had some cramping in my chest on the way in this morning."
- An otherwise healthy 59-year-old male arrives for excision of a melanoma and a groin dissection. A pre-operative EKG is read by the computer as "abnormal." A call is made to the patient's internist who states: "It's been like that for years."

"The surgical gods are
telling you something."

There is no science, no "evidence-based" surgical fact, no "outcome data" or double-blind study to support what I am about to say, but hear me and hear me well: *cancel this case!* You may have an angry patient. You may lose a referral. You may invoke the ire of the scheduling people, your office staff, or even your colleagues. The surgical gods are telling you something. They are giving you a warning - something very rare for the operating surgeon.

Oh, I can feel the groans now floating onto this page. But ... the patient had to take a day off of work. But ... the internist said there were no changes on the EKG. But ... you really don't believe in that astrological-numerological mumbo-jumbo do you? Hear this and hear this well: there are mysterious forces at work in our profession. Sometimes they will show their hand in the subtlest of ways. Listen for them. Look for them. And when you hear or see them, heed their warnings.

Cancel the case!