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An MSK fragment

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At various points in my treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering, things have happened that shouldn't just get forgotten. That doesn't mean that I think all the important medical developments are over; I don't think that at all, and we're still vigorously looking for possible next steps that could alter my situation, and about which I look forward to blogging. But still, along the way, there've been some moments that deserve to be recalled for other reasons. I'm going to try to find some of these moments and make sure that they too have their place in the little history that the blog is meant to be. Let's call them "fragments" from MSK.

So: I've just finished a 5-day course of radiation, meant to attack the tumor activity I've recently experienced. Needless to say, this is a high-tech business. With the help of almost 10 different staff members, plus the eery, powerful-looking radiation machines themselves, MSK carefully immobilized me as much as possible, aimed the radiation beams at particular spots marked out on my abdomen with tattoos, and monitored the success or failure of each image-taking venture.

My role in this was to be more or less naked. This was, sadly, not that exciting – but still members of that team of staff members (did I mention they were all attractive young women?) were always on the job, aiming the beams and, when necessary, moving parts of me out of the way so that each radiation burst could reach its destination. It was all pretty clinical. As to privacy, what privacy? For clothing, I was mostly reduced to a hospital gown that opened behind me, and lifted up for easy access as needed; even as an enlightened adult (I hope) I found this embarrassing, but a hospital gown opening in front of me would have presented essentially the same problems and called for the same responses.

None of that, however, is actually my point. My point is to ask this question: where were my clothes during all this? Weren't they in some well-designed patient locker, suitable to accompany treatment designed and administered with such technological sophistication? Well, no. Why not? Because this particular part of MSK does not have well-designed patient lockers. The secret of good locker design has been found, but not applied here; in the midst of various buttons is a lock mechanism that does not, well, lock. Instead, the patient carries his or her belongings with a somewhat older technological tool, a large brown paper bag. I mean, really!
