

Hospital Hub 2040

She took long and steady breaths as the glass doors slid open. The air inside smelled faintly sterile, with a hint of eucalyptus drifting from the planter at the entrance which she knew was there to make the hospital feel more welcoming. Her palms were damp. She counted each inhale, each exhale. *You're not here as a patient*, she reminded herself. *You're here to work*.

Her body didn't seem to know the difference though. Her pulse was fast and uneven; she could feel the old edge of dread rising in her chest. She had forgotten to eat breakfast, but it was too late because she had a tour before she started her first day of work.

"Hi, its Maya, isn't it?" the lady at the front desk asked, "I'm Kathrine"

Maya tried to smile as she accepted the name badge Kathrine offered her and followed her down the hallway. The hospital was small and only had one ward but that was enough for the small town that had previously not had any hospital at all. It was connected to the Aboriginal Community Health Hub; the centre was run jointly by Elders and clinicians together ensuring that first nations self-determination was at the centre of care. Incorporating Aboriginal knowledge and values, it also offers playgroups, allied health services and a community gym. AI helped triage patients, deciding whether patients would be sent to the ward in emergency cases: GP clinic for urgent but stable cases; and non-urgent or follow-ups to telehealth or preventative health programs.

Maya shivered remembering the nightmarish hour-long drives to the hospital when she was younger, waking in the middle of the night in pain so intense she couldn't stand.

"Throughout the day you will stay at the front desk directing visitors, people coming into Emergency and patients here for allied health and GP appointments, but you should know your way around the rest of the hospital," Kathren said as she led her into the ward.

She was shown the x-ray room and operating theatre where telesurgery was performed remotely by a surgeon in the city who controlled all the machines that were glinting under the hospital lighting. Maya saw virtual health rooms where patients were seen by specialists while assisted by a nurse and the ward where patients received in person care. It made her stomach churn thinking about all the time she had spent in one of those rooms, staring at a white ceiling while she was in excruciating pain, that doctors didn't believe was there.

After being shown all the facilities Kathrine announced that she had something important to run by Dr Moon. It was the start of Maya's workday, so she sat at the chair behind the front desk with the other receptionist. There was a steady flow of patients who disappear as quickly as they arrive as they are directed toward the appropriate

service. There weren't an overwhelming number of patients at the medical centre due to their virtual care clinic where referrals and repeat prescriptions were dispensed to people in their homes. Maya noticed an elderly man frowning at a self-check-in, like the ones at fast food restaurants. She went over to help him scan his Medicare card, showing that patients could still choose to check in with a real person if they wanted.

When a young woman walked in with an injury from her construction job Maya took her Medicare information and directed her to triage where a nurse, assisted with their AI triage system, asked questions about her pain levels and took her blood pressure and heart rate.

Maya stood to help again and immediately regretted it. Her head spun and knees buckled under her. Everything went completely black as she collapsed to the floor.

Nurses rushed to her to make sure she didn't hurt herself in the fall and she could still hear them talking.

"Are you okay? Can you hear me?... We need help!"

"Do we know if she has any medical history? Medications?"

"Requesting access now. Confirming I'm involved in direct care. Emergency access granted. No history since 2025- health anxiety."

"Vitals from staff wearable linked. Tachycardia. No prior syncope episodes."

"She's only been wearing it an hour."

"Okay, let's move her to a recovery suite."

When Maya woke up, she opened her eyes to the sight of two nurses staring back down at her.

"Are you alright darl?"

Maya squeezed her eyes shut as a tear ran down her cheek *Great. Now everyone at my new job will think I'm crazy.*, "I'm alright," she said as she tried to push herself up to a sitting position.

"Hang on," one of the nurses, Sue according to her name tag, said guiding Maya back to a lying position. "Your blood pressure is still so low."

She hadn't even seen a blood pressure cuff on her arm. When she was ready, Maya was wheeled into a room, guided to a hospital bed and then left alone while Sue Consulted Dr Moon. Maya looked around the white room. *Don't bother saying you're in pain, they'll just think you're imagining it.* She could feel herself panicking and she was sweating. It

felt like her heart was going to beat right out of her chest and she started breathing fast, shallow breaths and ...

“Hi Maya, we have Dr Moon analysing your results right now. While you wait here are some biscuits and juice for you to eat.” Maya accepted them, still a bit uneasy.

Later a doctor entered her room and pulled up a chair, “Maya, I think you’ve had a syncopal episode, possibly linked to dysautonomia. But Dr Moon also suggested a few predictive health concerns and some other things we should consider,” he told her.

“Dr Moon like... actually believes me?” Maya asked?

The Dr laughed, “Dr Moon isn’t a person, it’s our AI consultant.”

The doctor asked her to describe her symptoms. She hesitated but told him anyway and this time the doctor listened without interrupting and typed rapidly so that every detail was documented. He told her that Dr Moon had already suggested the Autonomic Clinic and Genomics due to possible EDS.

“we took some samples earlier for the genomic clinic and you have an appointment next week in one of our telehealth rooms,” the doctor told her. “A telehealth nurse will be available to perform any necessary assessments while you have a virtual consult with a cardiologist and a neurologist. Fifteen years ago, you’d have had to drive 600 kilometres to Sydney to see a specialist for an initial consult, but those days are over.”

The doctor was kind and offered practical dysautonomia advice to implement over the next week. Some of his advice came from brand new research from this year. Maya stared at her hands, stunned. *This feels...* Instead on fear and doubt she feels quiet hope rising. *Maybe they can help me.*

“Okay, we’re done here, Maya.”

“Should I... go back to my desk?”

The doctor smiled warmly.

“Not today. I think you deserve the rest of the day off.”