

CREATIVE SPACE

I am only a student of medicine

PRATEEK HARNE

I am only a student of medicine
 Cannot prescribe the pills that may cure Mr G,
 Just wheeled into the emergency,
 A sixty something, 'altered mentally'.

The resident and I march towards the unknown
 She leads the way, I observe his worrisome knowns
 His anxious family accompanying him
 "Must feel nice," I mumble fondly within.

My team gets to solving the pressing puzzle
 Joining the dots, looking for the final piece
 Voila! Cancer 'mets' and anti-anxiety meds
 The rust behind his thinking valves and jets.

Brilliant minds have done it again
 The family, though, is unsure whether loss or gain
 They can't help but see his inability to speak,
 The frustration, the grimace of pain.

He lies there fighting the delirium,
 His stare reminiscent of an empty aquarium.
 His wife doesn't shed a tear,
 "We stay strong, it's what he would hold dear."

His daughters, inconsolable,
 Perhaps missing their father's laugh,
 Alas, replaced by incoherent groans and wheezes
 That escape his body, twisted with pain.

And I? What could I possibly do?
 I am only a student of medicine
 Can't yet prescribe
 The pills that may cure him

I flounder, even though he doesn't worsen
 Medicines were treating the disease, not the person
 I betray my passivity and do what I know....
 Listen and talk, and then listen some more.

What seems easy, has twined in their minds
 I give them my time, leaving no questions behind
 Each day is new, full of queries and challenges.
 Some days look bright, others leave staggering balances.

Time and patience educate the family,
 Love and compassion restore humanity.
 This is every day now, like a righteous calling
 Until G's consciousness claws back slowly.

There are tears, there is joy, as this family unfurls
 He mumbles his wife's name and then his girls'
 He sees me for the first time, baffled I believe
 But I know him well, and I feel the upheave

The wife and daughters hug me, defences crushed
 Inconsolable, their tears rush
 Touched, I speak, almost spinally,

"I did not prescribe the pills that cured him."

She replies softly and leaves me humbled,
 'You did much more, you didn't let us crumble'
 I could palpate that feeling, my defences fissuring
 Tears rolling down with bodies leaning

Cognisance of the process of healing-
 It's never just pills, it's a bigger deal
 Someday I will prescribe, if it be so destined
 But I can't ever lose sight of true healing pristine

For I am not only a
 student of Medicine
 But the medicine that will heal him.

*I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science,
 and that warmth, sympathy and understanding may outweigh
 the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug*

- Hippocrates [Modern version of the Oath].

Authors: **Prateek Harne** (prateekharn17@gmail.com), Resident Physician,
 SUNY Upstate Medical University, New York, USA.

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