

Rendez-vous

■ Cite as: *CMAJ* 2017 March 27;189:E470. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.161238

CMAJ Podcasts: author reading at <https://soundcloud.com/cmajpodcasts/161238-enc>

I never thought we would meet again. I still remember clearly our last day. It was a day like any other, except it wasn't. Not for me. I entered the hospital, walked straight through the busy corridors. My brain was numb, racing with questions: *How can colon cancer do this to a person so fast? Two months ago, everything was normal. How did we end up here?* My body mindlessly took the steps and turns to get to your hospital room.

I took a moment to stand by your room entrance. The moment was fleeting but beautiful. The sun was setting in vibrant shades; darkness had yet to come. And there you were encapsulated in this stillness. My Dad, in your weakest and toughest moment. You were waiting, surrounded by those who loved you, lying in the hospital bed as the centrepiece of the room. Your eyes were closed, but you knew I had arrived. You were barely breathing, just shallowly gasping for air. Holding on to life by a thread while waiting for final goodbyes.

I said my goodbye, and I let go. Life went on, and four years passed by.

Except I did see you again. When I was in third year of medical school, I met you in the emergency department. You were admitted to our internal medicine service, unaware that it was going to change your life. You thought you couldn't eat properly because you had a large "stomach hernia." I told you that you had lung cancer with metastasis to the liver. It was the first time you had been told of cancer, and you became fearful. You had so many questions I could not answer. So instead I sat with you for an hour, and I listened while you cried.

The next time we met, you got angry. "No one is telling me anything! You know answers that you're not telling me!" You yelled at me while your wife sobbed silently. You demanded answers, knowing intuitively that something was wrong. You didn't feel included in your own health care team. You



kept yelling, and I listened. Then you apologized, and told me you weren't mad at me. You were mad because you felt trapped in this goddamn hospital. Mad because you were sick and couldn't do anything about it. Our internal medicine team told you that the results showed advanced pancreatic cancer, and you were referred to palliative care.

Late one night, I was paged to see you for an irritated intravenous line. However, you weren't just upset about the intravenous. You were tired. Tired of being poked with needles, frustrated with endless medications and discouraged because you couldn't go back to your loving home. The cancer had already metastasized; you were thin, frail and hardly able to sit yourself up. You were waiting for an available bed in the palliative care unit, and all you wanted was comfort.

The time came when we said goodbye one more time.

I was completing my rural medicine rotation. After a full day of clinic, my preceptor told me our day wasn't over yet. He drove me through the cold, dark evening, led me through quiet corridors of a hospice filled

with only a few nurses and patients, and then to your room.

We opened the door. The room was dimly lit, and decorated with nostalgia. There was stillness and a subdued, quiet magic in the air. Loved ones surrounded you, and they were waiting. You were the centrepiece of the room. Your eyes were closed, and you were only quietly gasping for air. My preceptor said his final goodbye. Your family was grateful for our presence, and we left the room. I was grateful for everything you taught me, and then you were gone.

Diana Kim MSc

MD candidate, Class of 2017, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

This article has been peer reviewed.

The author obtained consent to tell her father's story. Other patient details have been changed to protect their identities.

This story won an honourable mention from the 2016 Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians for their Annual Undergraduate Narrative Award for Palliative Medicine.