

Narrative: a life-saving change

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Her heart beats.
She looks up at me,
 smiles.
Or maybe it's a grimace.
She's in pain, no doubt.
 More meds in store today.
 More pokes. More blood. More.
Sips of water, bland food. Maybe a treat.
 No.
She wants it all to end, she tells me.
 But she hasn't told them.
 Them.
 The doctors.
She is scared.
 Not of dying. But of them.
 The doctors.
Her heart beats.
Another day. Still here.
 Still in pain.
 Still wanting to leave.
She is brave today. Asks to go somewhere
else.
 The doctors say palliative care.
I cry.
She smiles.
 We hold hands.
We change rooms.
 Change roommates.
 Change smells.
 Change nurses.
 Change doctors.
 Change.
We discuss our goals.
 Discuss our wishes.
 Discuss our future.
 Discuss.
We stop daily blood work.
 Stop fluid drips.
 Stop chemo.
 Stop.
Less poking. Less blood. Less.
We start medication for her pain.
 For her stomach.
 For her nerves.

Start comfort.
 Start living.
 Start.
Her heart beats.
She looks up at me,
 smiles.
It's not a grimace.
She is not in pain, no doubt.
 New meds in store today.
 A pump, so she can have some control.
Control, that's new.
 She likes control.
 I like control.
Sips of water, soft food. Maybe a treat.
 Ice cream.
She laughs.
 I smile.
 Goodnight.

Another day. Still here.
 No pain.
 Ready to leave.
She is brave today. Asks to stay right there.
I cry.
She smiles.
 We hold hands.
Her heart.

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Editor's note: This poem won the 2019 Undergraduate Narrative Award for Palliative Medicine administered by the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians.



The photograph "Connection, a medical learner perspective" by Hayeong Rho, was awarded honourable mention in the 2019 Undergraduate Narrative Award for Palliative Medicine administered by the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians. Hayeong Rho thanks the patient and family. The family has given consent for the image to be published. Hayeong Rho has given permission to publish the photo.