

Poem

Cachexia, Following Flowers

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Abstract

Description

This poem explores a similar experience I once encountered working with an oncologist, as a patient learns about the recurrence of cancer after being in remission. The situation struck me as I felt the stir of human sadness and courage, and I would like to dedicate the poem to those living with cancer, who face the trepidation of their daily lives with bravery. What I hope this writing demonstrates is the depth and complexity of emotions felt by both patients and their physicians in times of bad news and expresses the beauty that underlies a strong and genuine patient-physician relationship.

Keywords

medicine in the arts; humanities; poetry; neoplasms; recurrence; remission induction; neoplastic processes; medical oncology; cancer; undergraduate medical education

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The first thing I saw as we entered the room
was the pink of rhododendrons,
Petals drifting wayside to the floor,
Being held by a man with his wife
Grinning in earnest joy.

“One year! One year!
Not a drop of sickness in him!”
Thrusting over the florets
Together, they sang to us
a psalm of life with no cancer:
The glorious mystery of
Treatment however so sickly
Yielding way to the miracle
of dying pieces and parts
Becoming anew,
reconstructing what was left behind
In those intervals of such darkness
And giving way to a life
with every unit of time revered
Carefully in the palms of their hands.

The physician nodded, gracious for this kindness
And with crisp trepidation
Opened the CT scan images.
She inched her way through each slice
Until the bullet hit:
The keyboard mouse lightly traced an outline

Infiltrating the liver, a lump completely of
temporal horror, revealing the
elasticity of time shooting
back at the husband and wife.

It seemed as if I was watching cachexia occur
In only a single moment, as this man
Soaked in the certainty of his body's
Own secrecy and betrayal.

The song strings of my breathlessness
mixed with their shallow silence,
as the physician spoke, composing
a new way ahead, her hands trembling,
concealed underneath
the foliage of the flowers.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares she has no conflicts of interest.

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