



# Reflections

## They have a story

I. Vivian Ewa, MBBS, MRCP(UK), CCFP, COE

I want to share my encounter with a patient who helped to change my practice.

In my geriatrics rotation during my family medicine residency, I met Mr A (not his real name), an elderly gentleman who was recovering from hip hemiarthroplasty. He always seemed so sad, miserable, and frustrated; I could not figure out why. He was doing well in rehabilitation, and we all thought he was making remarkable progress.

As I passed him in the corridor one morning, I stopped and mentioned to him how well he was doing. He looked at me and said, "Well, if that's what you think."

I replied, "I do think so; you have made a lot of progress in less than 2 weeks." He then told me that he was walking between the bars today and that it was not good enough for him. As I walked along, I said to him, "I think you are doing very well."

I barely heard him when he said, "I used to be an Olympic long-distance runner." I stopped in my tracks and went back to him. Mr A told me about his Olympic gold medals and how fast he used to go. He explained that, until the day he broke his hip, he was very

active. Then it all made sense: his frustration with his slow progress and his sadness.

I sat with him and explained the deconditioning that sometimes occurs after surgery. I reminded him that he had gone through a serious operation, that it will be a slow but gradual road to full recovery, and that he was actually doing quite well.

Mr A was a different man after that in terms of his mood, and he did do well.

As for me, I was a different doctor. His story illustrated to me what family medicine is all about. Knowing how factors relate to one another and affect a person's response to disease and recovery is critical to delivery of optimum patient care.

Now, even in a busy office, emergency department, or hospital, I ask myself, "What is the story here?"

*Dr Ewa is a hospitalist and care of the elderly physician in Calgary, Alta.*



<sup>Canadian</sup>  
**Family Physician**

**Le Médecin de famille**  
canadien

Written by family physicians for family physicians—your voice in scientific publishing