



# A complete recovery

Patrick Sullivan MD CCFP

**D**octors (and anyone who works in health care or helping professions, in their own way too) have to reach some sort of truce with the nature of their work; being good-hearted aspirants to the profession, there is the idea that they will alleviate suffering. And they do, sometimes, in some ways. But it does not take long in the clinic to recognize that it is a perpetual presence, too; whether it is a hemoglobin A<sub>1c</sub> level that seems as though it will never come down, or a person who just cannot get on the right track, or a stealthy

pancreatic cancer, there are always the problems we cannot solve that must be accepted. We all find in our own way the right balance between continuing to work against suffering, against disease, and reconciling ourselves to their presence—as we must, if we are to maintain ourselves as we spend our lives in medicine. And, to extents more and less obvious, suffering provides our motivation and our purpose as doctors: financial, intellectual, existential. This poem is an exploration of a thought experiment: what would it be like for doctors if one day everyone just got better?

### Then one day no helicopters

Then one day no helicopters  
floated in to land on hospitals' roofs.  
The emergency rooms were quiet  
as churches, their staffs sat  
in circles munching chips,  
playing Scrabble.  
The internal medicine and surgical teams  
on their morning rounds  
discharged the wards entirely,  
debated the pathophysiology of  
this exodus unprecedented.  
All of my patients in clinic that day  
were sent off with reassurances I gave wholeheartedly,  
no creeping suspicions unspoken.  
All the lab results flipped through,  
all the imaging unremarkable,  
quietly filed.  
Some of the doctors were bored: the wranglers' foe strangely stanchued.  
Some unbelieving scrounged the city centres, the farms, the ski slopes.  
Some called brokers, talked portfolios, transitions.  
Some Facebook posted *Finally!!!* :) then  
paused, waited unweighted and  
uncertain in this innocence  
clerkship consumed.

Dr Sullivan is a family physician practising in Kanata, Ont.

**Competing interests**  
None declared