



Prognostic signs

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Having worked in pediatric palliative care for 20 years, I had many opportunities to attend discussions with patients, their families, and the health professionals who care for them. I frequently heard from the patients and their family members their profound sense of the health-related information yet to be shared. They came to understand what was to be shared by careful observation of the nuanced behaviour of the health professionals.

I wanted this poem and the accompanying pieces of my Raku-fired pottery to share that awareness of patients and their family members. I enjoy creating pottery that complements my poems, hoping the sum proves greater than the individual parts.

Prognostic signs

far keener and faster
than the flight of fingers
on an abacus
they sum
nearly instantaneously
the intent
of our approach

their internal scales
quickly discern the slimmest
variance in weight
able to smell what nuances
the wind carries into the room
as we enter

They wait for us
watching and measuring the fragments
like confetti
that swirl around and stick
to the package
holding the news
we carry into the quiet
of the room
to deliver

Like a book
they read us
as we ask
"Who would you like present?"
waive their food restrictions
offer a visit from spiritual care

They watch as patterns morph
and colours change
from sun-soaked to dismal gray
the wrapping of our message
shape shifts as we
carry in more chairs

offer a handmade quilt
grant permission for their dog
to visit

They predict the approach
upon the ground we stand
of an earthquake
long before the sensors start
their ominous ticking
well before the first spike is inked

How our pauses are paced
the depth of silence
that breaks our rush of words
is quantified
every span carefully calibrated
each noted and wholly understood
like songs without words
they know the score

Much as fingertips race across Braille
they grade the pressure
made with our every
touch
their sensory homunculus over-represented
by supernatural powers of observation

Well-versed in nanos
calculators of microns of emotion
no interpreters needed
as readers of sign language
they are unrivalled champions
prescient of the sadness
we have yet to share

Dr Frager is a retired pediatric palliative care physician and an active poet and potter in Spry Bay, NS.

Competing interests
None declared