

A way of responding

Laura Zacharin MD CMC CCFP FCFP

We can use poetry as a container for events that confound, mystify, and confuse us. Without providing “real” answers, poetry can offer an alternate way of responding to our own lives and the lives of the people we care for.

Third floor: Palliative Care

The first night in his new room he slipped
getting out of bed *just to see*
and fell

onto his naked backside.

He was still on blood thinners
and water pills, pain pills, and
something for sleep.

There was a bruise
the size of an outstretched hand
over the right hip bone that jutted
through his cellophane skin,
like a slap but it wasn't
a slap.

He wasn't
completely naked but
the blue gown gaped
at the back, even with the crumpled ties
that I fastened
and re-fastened
into tidy bows.

We want to take him home I said, first
to the nurse then to the doctor and to the other
doctor.

Your father is dying, she shrilled
from down the length of the pale green hall
then she sent a social worker
to tell me, but this time
sitting down as if this were something new
I needed to be told
in a quiet room and a sturdy chair.

I took my distance glasses
out of the case, sat them on the bridge
of my nose while she spoke.
It would be a few more days
before I went back
to clean his fridge. Maybe it *was* news to me.

Then why is he still on a blood thinner?

I asked the social worker
who was looking at the window or her watch.

And can he have his underpants?

Dr Zacharin is a poet and family physician in Toronto, Ont.

Competing interests
None declared

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