

# A way of responding

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**W**e 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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