



# Costs of inequity

Yelena Zavalishina MD CCFP MPH

**T**he global pandemic caused many to reflect on the state of health care systems around the world. Some have called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) “a great equalizer”; however, we now see that it is bringing to light rather striking health inequities. Many of the patients I see daily are uninsured, unclaimed refugees who often face a great deal of financial burden and precarious health as a result. When the government announced that patients in Ontario with no health cards would be free of health care costs (brought on by the COVID-19 crisis), I felt a strong sense of pride for the country I practice medicine in. Yet, I hope that when this virus no longer threatens us as fiercely as it has done so far, we stay committed to providing the best care to those who need it the most. There is no better time to start the conversation about health equity.

## Not yet a goodbye

She will leave  
on a plane  
August the eighth,  
around noon.  
She tells me she already has the ticket.  
I know it is one way,  
but I don't dare to assume  
or tell her that I know that fact already.  
She's flying home to die.  
We couldn't give her what she needed here:  
Money.  
It all costs money.  
The home care, nursing staff,  
the chemo.  
She's been a visitor right here  
but been one for too long.  
And little did she know  
only a few short months ago  
that breathlessness she carried in her chest  
was not a cold  
but rapid, angry tumour  
invading every crevice of her lungs,  
and then her bones,  
and then ...  
all of her being.  
Do you feel short of breath? I ask.  
“No, not today,” she tells me,

while her blood thinner-ed veins  
keep pumping with resolve,  
keep fighting  
the inevitable clarity  
of stage 4  
cancer.  
Lung.  
She never smoked.  
She's only 46.  
She has a son.  
He was born here.  
He isn't coming home with her.

I see an airport  
August the eighth,  
and an impossible goodbye.  
I lose my balance,  
voice begins to shake,  
but all that I can say is:  
“I'll see you Friday.”

For me  
it's not yet a goodbye.

Dr Zavalishina is a family physician practising in Toronto, Ont.

**Competing interests**  
None declared

*Can Fam Physician* 2021;67:e153. DOI: 10.46747/cfp.6706e153