



Blog of the Month

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As a final year medical student, I have been exposed to patients with a spectrum of terminal diagnoses from cancer to end-stage dementia. A common theme amongst all these patients is the importance of timely psychological and spiritual support, especially towards the end of life. Considering the impact of the diagnosis on family members is equally essential to provide patient-centred care. I have had the privilege to witness on many occasions the profound difference that conversation can make towards a patient's outlook and eventually, the way they cope with their condition.

From my experience over the past few years of medical school, I have written this poem from a third person perspective, describing the last few days in the life of a terminally ill patient. I felt the title "Her days and nights" was appropriate because it provides insight into the evolution of the thoughts that transpire in the patient's mind over the course of 24 hours. These thoughts are inevitably interrupted by the symptoms that the patient experiences as a result of her terminal diagnosis. I have attempted to reflect throughout the piece how isolating a terminal condition can be for the patient.

Her days and nights

In ennui and exhaustion, she finds,
An inexplicable priceless peace of mind.
As she is granted escape,
From her constant landscape.

Her constant landscape consisting of unfamiliar unfriendly faces,
Sometimes in reality, occasionally in dreams in desolate places.
Before she is given a magic mysterious drug,
That makes these fictitious foes crawl back under the rug.

But then she is gripped with a sense of suffocation, unease,
As she struggles to sit up, struggles to breathe.
Windows are opened, a nurse rushes to help her clear her chest,
"Better?" The nurse asks. She nods politely, secretly dreading the next episode of unrest.

As she lies still in sterile sheets of wisteria and white,

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With cold carrots by her bedside illuminated by serene sunlight,
She thinks about her family – *“When is the next time they will come see me?
And if they do visit, will I be around to see?”*

She has been told it gets worse, not better,
So she settles into bed with her favourite digestives and reads the letter,
The letter she has read a hundred times in a hundred ways,
A letter penned by her daughter reminiscent of happier days.

Midway through the letter, she stops.
By a rising unpleasant sensation in her stomach which makes her sob.
She recalls the joys of eating a warm home cooked meal,
She thinks, *“If only I could control the way I feel”*.

And once again, she is gripped by panic and pain,
But she is reassured by her nurse, who has stood by her through sunshine and rain.
Once again, she thinks about her family- *“When is the next time they will come see me?
And if they do visit, will I be around to see?”*

She sees the joyous moments of her life flash before her eyes,
The transformative turbulent lows, and the ebullient, ephemeral highs.
That are all a proud part of the life that has now condensed into,
Her last few breaths, her last few memories, she knew.