LESSONS FROM A PALLIATIVE PATIENT
Tamara Hoppe

In the past year, I have learned how life can end, sometimes the consequence of a long illness, and at other times cruelly without warning. I have been exposed not only to theoretical ethical discussions concerning end-of-life care focusing on the emotional and spiritual aspects of dying, but also to real experiences on the medical wards. Recently, I was on a team treating a palliative patient whose needs called for hospice care. After speaking with him, I was surprised to learn that he was not afraid of death—he had accepted it as inevitable. Rather, he was sad because he would be unable to die in his own home, instead, in a strange place. He did not “rage against the dying of the light” as the poet Dylan Thomas wrote of his own father’s death, but wanted to be with his family, surrounded by his loved ones, at the moment when his life’s flame was extinguished. This conversation is one I will never forget.

Sometimes, palliative medicine can be unforgivably depressing, yet each time I enter the hospital and see patients who are gravely ill, I remember the importance of providing caring and understanding to patients and their families. I still find it hard to deal with pain and death; the extent of suffering is something for which my education has not fully prepared me. Perhaps I will never be able to accept the reason for its existence in the world. Yet being so cognizant of the reality and inevitability of death has given me a more mature perspective on my own life. I hope that self-awareness, together with my experiences, will help me develop greater compassion and empathy for the needs of those who are nearing the end of life.

REFERENCE

Author Biography
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