

YOU

letters, DNR, became the three letters he did not want to swallow and nothing we could offer could make it more palatable.

It was not that he didn't want to honor her wishes, nor was it that he didn't know that his wife was ill. She simply was ready and he was not. Death is generous, it doesn't just impact one individual, it inserts itself into every life touched by that individual and weighs heaviest upon those left alive.

Ashley Kreher, Class of 2019

The first time I saw you, my heart dropped.

There you were, lying still in that cool room with the curtain drawn, your husband sitting by your side. His expression distant, the weight of the world on his shoulders. Though as soon as we entered, that weight fell upon ours.

His body was fragile under the stress as he leaned forward with his head in his hands. His eyes were focused and heavy with emotion. Upon seeing us, he knew. How do you begin to tell someone there is no hope?

Your communication was mechanical, with the crisp breaths of the BiPAP and the rhythmic beats of the cardiac monitor establishing your cadence. Your husband let you carry the conversation.

As we approached his eyes met ours, and with that came a rapid flood of words. "She is just ill," "she was perfectly fine yesterday when I saw her," "the emergency room doctor thinks it is just the flu," "they are doing everything they can." As he looked at his wife, his partner for many years, the stoic expression he wore broke like waves against the shore and tears poured down his face. He knew she wasn't herself, she wasn't okay.

He had been in similar situations prior and reality was approaching him with open arms. Within ten minutes I saw the five stages of grief flash before my eyes. His wife, his partner, the person that his life centered around for many years, was declining and she did not want medical support. Those three

Few people can immediately think with striking clarity when that decision weighs upon them. Rarely is it anticipated or discussed. We know that death is going to occur at some point, though we hope that we as family and friends do not have to make that decision. We don't want to give up hope, we want to hold on to the idea that everything will be okay.

My attending, who had the privilege of knowing this patient for many years, navigated the conversation artfully with elegance and care. Though years of experience does not make the conversation easier. Each time the discussion is introduced challenges arise that are unique and are experienced by both the patient and provider. As time progresses patients grow to be members of your family, making conversations meaningful though equally hard.

For me, overcoming loss became my challenge. It left a feeling of helplessness, it left room for questions. What if we caught it sooner? What if we implemented this therapy over the other? Would it have made a difference? As a student, this was the first patient I encountered that we could only offer comfort and support to her and her husband. This was not the only time I encountered a similar challenge on my rotation, though it was the first.

Within a half hour the harsh cadence of the BiPAP was silenced, the last push of epinephrine was given, and time was at a standstill.

The next morning, while rounding on my patients, my mind kept drifting back to you. My phone was silent the night before, but I couldn't find your chart. As we approached your room, I braced myself, and there you were.

You were laughing, sitting up, curious about why you were here and how you got to this bed. I saw the numbers, I saw the vital signs, the labs, but here you are before me. I felt like the wind

was knocked out of me, and I couldn't help but to smile. Then I thought of him, your husband. He was at home, unaware. He embraced the greatest challenge of all, surrendering his hope with it unknowingly being restored during the calm transition of night.

Medicine isn't absolute. It is complicated and as much as we think that we have insight and an aspect of control, at times we are not immune to miracles. To be offered the privilege to practice medicine and to bear witness to both its wonders and challenges is an honor that not many are afforded. My experiences have provided me with a new perspective. They have made medicine

more meaningful, further strengthening my dedication I have to the field. Through the challenges posed and endured, I have grown not only as a person but as a future physician. My patient's faces, their stories, and their words will remain with me throughout my career. ■

Ashley is a current fourth year medical student at the Florida State University College of Medicine-Sarasota Regional Campus. She is an aspiring Family Medicine physician and is inspired by the people she meets, her experiences, and the world around her. Ashley exercises her creativity through a variety of outlets including photography, reflective writing, charcoal, and pastels.



AUTUMN DANCE
Julia and Kathleen Miao

Kathleen Miao is a medical student at NYU School of Medicine. Julia Miao is a student at Cornell University. They both enjoy visiting family and friends in the Sunshine State of Florida.