



Conversations

Upreet Dhaliwal, MS

Former Director-Professor of Ophthalmology
University College of Medical Sciences, University of Delhi

Corresponding Author:

Upreet Dhaliwal
A-61, Govindpuram, Ghaziabad 201002, UP, India
Email: upreethdaliwal at gmail dot com

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You nudge and press
to unmask the pain that troubles me.
The frown of concentration on your face
stops me from moaning aloud -
I dare not distract you from your task -
I need you to find
what's hurting my bones.

As you listen to the voices in my chest,
cold steel and a snaking rubber tube
link us through an unequal bond.
Can you hear the patter of my heart
as it stutters in fear?
Fear of probing fingers and sharp needles....
and fear of death?

I know you can see things
that are deep inside me
and when you find what's wrong
I'll be better soon.
Shall I tell you of the lump in my breast?
Or of my sister who died last year?
You are thinking, thinking, while I pray silently.
You make notes and order tests.
Residents and nurses scurry about ...

for me. I feel overwhelmed.
And safe.

I have hope, but there are questions...
I start to ask, but you hurry away
to the next bed -
to other patients; some pale and trembling;
some deathly still.
I will ask when you come tomorrow,
and we'll talk about my sister;
and why I don't want to die;
and of the lump in my breast.

Residents take over – labs and x-rays.
And needles.
Some are gentle, some rough
– but they're all exhausted.
I'm not the only patient they see
So I pretend I don't hurt
from the pokes and prods.
After all, they're doing their best...
Aren't they?
Just like they're trained to do?

I wish they weren't all men.
Last night, a lady resident was on call.
I should have told her,
when she came to stick the needle
into veins the others couldn't find.
She was quick and steady,
with dark circles around tired eyes,
but then somebody died, I think,
because her pager rang, and she ran.
I wonder if it's all right to talk to the nurses
about the lump in my breast?

This poem has an [associated commentary](#) written by Dr Tejinder Singh and Dr Juhi Kalra