

## FM REVIEW 2016 29 COMMENTS

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** This is a poignant poem by a strong physician-poet. It addresses an under-examined topic, namely patients living in group homes with underpaid workers to care for them, overworked legal guardians, and physicians with the responsibility of life and death for them. Two reviewers with special expertise in reviewing poetry liked it quite a bit, as did I. With a little more tweaking, I would recommend publication.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** This poignant poem focuses on a patient population that does not usually receive much attention - the denizens of group homes. I agree with reviewer 2 that some of its most powerful lines are those about the group home workers - these few brushstrokes bring them vividly to life. John himself is less present aside from his medical issues and his age. Can you show us this man's humanity in some way? Reviewer 1 felt that you did not represent the struggle of the physician in holding the weight of this life-and-death decision-making. While I do not think this is an accurate assessment (the last stanza intimates at the narrator's struggle in the sudden awakening weeks after the patient's death and the combing of her memory), please consider whether you can illuminate the narrator's process a bit more. Finally, I am in agreement with reviewer 3 that the medical details distance the reader and could be eliminated.

With a little additional tweaking, this piece will help our readers reflect on the patients in these circumstances, the underpaid workers who care for them, and the physicians who decide their lives.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR II:** Julie Phillips is one of my favorite family medicine poets. She is a confident wordsmith, and her poignant images invariably convey memorable moments in patient care. She has responded with thoughtfulness and care to the reviewers' and editor's concerns. In most cases she revised the poem in accordance with reviewer suggestions (removing unnecessary medical details; fleshing out the portrait of the patient). Where she disagreed (she did not see this scenario as primarily an ethical dilemma, as reviewer 1 interpreted it), she offered a conscientious rebuttal. I have one very small concern that I share with the author below; but I would recommend accepting this lovely poem regardless of her decision.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III:** Thank you for your conscientious and meticulous revisions. It is always a pleasure to work with someone who understands the power of language and is willing to consider the significance of every word. Thank you for removing much of the medical details - I hope you agree that they were more of a distraction than an addition. Thank you also for fleshing out the "portrait" of the patient with subtlety and innuendo (not too "on the nose"). I agree with your perspective regarding the non-existence of an ethical dilemma - this was not a dilemma so much as a responsibility and a grieving.

I have one remaining quibble. In the first stanza (which is much more compelling by the way) the word "confidence" seems ambiguous, and perhaps not in a good way. I think you mean it as "confidence in the patient's recovery"; but I read it as "confidence in yourself as the physician." I think the latter interpretation undermines your statement that you had no doubt about the decision you made and takes the poem in a different direction. If you agree this is a problem, maybe you

could substitute "hope" or even "hope of recovery." On the other hand, if the ambiguity of your original choice is intentional, and you like the various interpretations, please leave the ms as is, but please resubmit with a brief explanation of your thinking.

Again, this poem addresses an often ignored and poignant situation, and we are delighted to see you bring it to the attention of readers in such a personally involving way.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR III:** The author has made the minor word change suggested. This is a poignant poem that should be accepted.

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III:** I do think hope works better, less ambiguous, and I actually like the way that different aspects of hope open and end the poem. You made a good catch about "hope and cruelty." Too much hope! I did like the rhythm of the line better with a single syllable word; I wish "optimism" were not quite such a mouthful! I tried out other options (cheerfulness, brightness, positivity, loyalty) but in the end I think "optimism" is the most accurate word to reflect the state of mind you're exploring. Thanks for being will to pay attention to the value of a single word.