

FHS COMMENTS 2018 5

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This poem describes the experience of a medical student confronted with a dying patient. The student wants to elicit the patient's final wishes about his manner of dying, but it is too late for communications, much as the student longs for direction. In the absence of patient wishes, chest compressions are begun. I particularly liked the way the poem plays with color and its absence. This is a creative device for illuminating the line between life and death.

I'd recommend a few changes. The title does not need to be in quotes. In general, I like the elevated tone of the piece, but in stanza 2, in my read, it goes overboard. Use of language such as "save" (except for) and "espy" come across as a bit pretentious and actually detract from the moving tone of the majority of the poem. By contrast, I liked the images that "I conjure a whisper, latent in panting breath," and "puffs of prose." These also are not examples of "common speech," but they fit with the overall mood and spirit.

In stanza 3, I was not sure of the meaning of "tread for reply." I think it is an automotive reference that has to do with "anchoring" the "wisp of understanding," but I wonder if there is another way to express this idea.

Stanzas 4 and 5 are well-crafted and evocative.

This poem captures something important in the "fading," and loss of "color" in the dying process; as well as the frustration of leaving until too late the solicitation of the patient's end of life wishes.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: his poem describes the experience of a medical student confronted with a dying patient. The student wants to elicit the patient's final wishes about his manner of dying, but it is too late for communications, much as the student longs for direction from the patient. In the absence of patient wishes, chest compressions are begun.

Overall, I like this poem. Occasionally, the tone veers into pretentiousness (especially the 2nd stanza) as the author tries for a poetic solemnity. But in general this slightly lofty tone works for me. I particularly liked the way the poem plays with color and its absence. This is a creative device for illuminating the line between life and death. I also like the sense of desperation and helplessness it conveys, without overt emotionality. The last line about the chest compressions is quite powerful.

This poem captures something important in the "fading," and loss of "color" in the dying process; as well as the frustration of leaving until too late the solicitation of the patient's end of life wishes. With a few minor changes, I'd recommend publication.