

POEM

The other side

The other side 1. Emergency entrance

'The morphine should work very soon'
Said the paramedic as the engine surged.
'Soon be there, don't worry, can you feel it?'
Familiar scenery passes from unfamiliar angles.
No seat belt feels strange, as does lying down while moving
Heavy traffic, lights flash and sirens blare.
Slow weaving between cars and lanes
Over footpaths, was that a traffic island?
The journey gets faster as the morphine does its stuff
Awareness remains but distorted as in a haze.
Safe arrival, why are all those people staring?
Through the doors and then lost in the hospital maze.
All I can do is relinquish control, an uncomfortable state.
So far, so good, but will I see my family again?

The other side 2. Six-bed bay

At best semiconscious, lying quietly and pale.
The beep, beep, beep of his ripple bed distracts.
Probably a big stroke, almost totally dependent.
Junior nurse asks 'shall I give him some soup?'
Senior nurse says 'his wife comes thrice daily'.
She feeds him much better than we can,
And gets upset if we do not allow her that role.

Another old man with not many visitors.
No obvious action, says he is just waiting.
The medical team should have come yesterday.
Feels OK and understands they are busy.
Will he go home or will they dig deeper?
Misplaced stoicism or simply lost in uncertainty?
Really hopes that they come by today.

A little younger, seems more anxious.
Lots of visitors, talk of football, females and fishing.

Surgeon comes to explain management choices.

Very careful, clear words, diagrams and FAQs.

Afterwards asks the nurse 'what's a laparotomy?'

'Didn't the doctor explain that this morning?

'Well yes, but it all takes a lot of understanding.'

Much older, very ill, curtains usually drawn.

Horrible cough, wet lungs and a weak voice.

Needs frequent chest percussion and suction.

Wife and daughter there often, attentive and caring.

Forced smiles, encouragement and practical words.

Not enough air for conversation, the eyes do the talking.

After they leave gasps 'I've not got long to go'.

Much younger man, probably late 30s.

Clearly had major surgery, tubes everywhere.

Visits by wife, children and parents together.

Basks amidst the everyday details of their lives

Intergenerational competitive games, teenage girl-talk.

Serious moments with each, but optimism prevails

Later says 'They are great, but just now a day feels like a week'.

The other side 3. Grief

Why did he leave us so suddenly?

Who wants to outlive their children?

What does it mean for the rest of us?

How do we cope amidst legal complexity?

Where are the answers to endless questions?

When will that big black dog leave us alone?

Author

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