

.death*

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“.death is the easiest note to write,” they told me.

It’s the same for every patient.

They have no pulse, no spontaneous movement.

No breath sounds auscultated. No sign of life.

But the phone call, that’s the hardest part.

How? When? Why? Was it painful?

Am I allowed to say I’m sorry?

Because I really am sorry.

I’m sorry you dropped your dad off,

And didn’t know it was goodbye.

Do we really do no harm?

Blood sticks and drips, central lines hurt.

But maybe dying alone is easier,

They don’t see you at the unimaginable end.

They don’t see your heart kill your kidney,

Gram-negative rods infect your blood.

But I see you. I watch your labs and check your chart.

I dread actually looking at you suffer.

I turn my eyes away from your agonal breath,

But I sit a little longer and hold your hand.

Hoping if I stay for a few more minutes,

You won’t have to do it alone.

.death—will it ever get easier?

Will I ever not feel my throat tighten and tears come when I talk to your family?

But maybe I want the doctor to cry,

Instead of typing .death without adding a single word.

**“.death” is an expandable dot phrase. Dot phrases are used in electronic medical records for a frequently used note or phrase.*

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