

The Catholic Doctor Is In: It's a God Thing

In recent years, people who are in the hospital are likely to be seen by unfamiliar doctors. With all the healthcare changes, the landscape on how patients are cared for has changed significantly. You can no longer expect to see your own doctor. In most cases it will be a hospitalist or one of your doctor's associates taking care of you. The majority of primary care physicians no longer make rounds on their hospitalized patients. I hate to admit it but it's the same in my cardiology practice even though I strongly disagree with the concept and lobbied against it.

Many of my patients have been quite verbal about not seeing me when they are sick and in the hospital. I am personally only on service (working in the hospital) about one week out of four. This just represents one more strike against the evolving new healthcare system that for the most part has been forced on us all, putting efficiency above patient care. Recently, I was on service and what happened that week was really quite unusual. In a normal week I might have a handful of my personal patients that need to be hospitalized for various problems like congestive heart failure or unstable angina. But this week, I had three of my very long term patients require hospital admission AND they were all entering into the last days of their life. I have learned after many years of practice that one of the most important things I can do as a doctor is to help people die peacefully and with dignity. Let me share the story of one of these patients (anonymously of course).

I had the honor of taking care of him for many years. He never complained about his very significant heart disease or why he was afflicted with such. He lived an amazingly active life despite his cardiovascular disease. His wife always greeted me with a wonderful smile and was totally dedicated to her man. Although he had advanced heart disease he entered the hospital this time with rapidly progressing metastatic cancer. Three months earlier when I saw him in the office he made me aware that his cancer was back, but he and his wife were still hopeful.

As it turns out, I was on call the same day he was admitted, and late that night I was on the floor evaluating a patient. At this point, I didn't even know that he had been admitted by the hospitalist team. Suddenly, I heard a stat page and multiple people running past the nursing station where I was working. A quick glance up told me they were all entering a room about 20 yards away. I went down the hall to see if I could be of assistance and, as I entered the room I recognized a beautiful elderly women at the bedside. We made eye contact and she subsequently blurted out "Dr. Kaminskas thank God you are here." Her husband was MY patient lying in the bed unresponsive. He

always was a small man but I immediately noticed that he had lost at least 20 lbs since I last saw him.

I talked with his wife, family members, and his nurse, and after examining the patient determined that he was in the process of dying. Because I knew the patient so well, the family and I were able to promptly make decisions together about his wishes at end-of-life. If I had not happened to be there at exactly that time, the responding doctors, who would not have known the patient or the situation, would have intubated him and placed him on a respirator since there had been no specific advanced directives placed on his chart. His last hours or now maybe days would have been on life support which could only prolong his suffering since he was at the end of his life.

As it turns out this patient died comfortably and with dignity just hours later with his family at the bedside. For as it says in Revelation 21:4 “He shall wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the former world has passed away”. Thank you Lord for putting me at the right place at the right time. This had to be a God Thing.

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