

My Vow

Category: Palliative and Hospice Care
written by Hollis Roth | September 27, 2024

Medical school was, at times, traumatic for me. Although I now love practicing medicine, I am honestly not sure I could endure the training again. In fact, many of the lessons I learned in the process of becoming a physician were about what type of physician I did *not* want to be.

I still remember the moment—midway through my third-year clerkship, following a tumultuous internal medicine block—when I realized that palliative care was where I belonged. By carrying forward lessons learned from the imperfect practice of medicine, I have developed a set of values that now ground my current practice.

I am a physician who will be honest with my patients, even when facing the unknown. I will answer their questions as best as I can—and when I cannot, I will find someone more knowledgeable.

I am a physician who will take the time to get to know my patients. I recognize and respect that each person may make different decisions based on their own values.

I am a physician who wants to learn about patients as people, not solely in the setting of their diagnoses. I want to learn what they value. If they have goals or dreams, I will do everything in my power to make these happen.

I am a physician, but I was a patient first, and I know how important it is to feel empowered to ask questions and to have those you love and trust present during important conversations. I want patients to feel comfortable asking questions and letting their caregivers know when we speak in unintelligible medical jargon.

I am a physician who will stay with patients during the entirety of their illness—if they choose—from diagnosis, through treatment, and, sometimes, to the end of their life. I will hold space with patients and their loved ones, even in silence in moments when words are not enough. I will care not only for patients, but also for their chosen family and loved ones.

On some days, I am not able to accomplish all these goals. On those days, I am a physician who feels the weight my shortcomings heavily.

Hollis Roth
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada