

August More Voices: Awaiting a Diagnosis

Category: Awaiting a Diagnosis
written by Paul Gross | August 1, 2025

Dear readers,

It was autumn, and I had just started medical school at the advanced age of thirty. I'd always been in good health, so when my symptoms first appeared, I was sure they couldn't be anything serious.

The first hint of a problem came in the middle of a seminar, when I had to leave the room to urinate. It struck me as a little odd. The next time the seminar met, I used the bathroom beforehand, just to be on the safe side, but it didn't help. Halfway through I had to excuse myself again.

Hunh.

The peeing got more frequent, and I was soon having to plan my activities around trips to the bathroom. It was annoying. And my sleep was getting interrupted as well.

Then came the thirst. Not an ordinary thirst, but one that had me getting up from my studies every five minutes for a glass of water or orange juice—as if I'd been playing basketball for hours under the summer sun.

What did I make of this?

My cousin Gary had been diagnosed with diabetes about ten years prior, and I knew that his diagnosis had been preceded by a raging thirst. But the thought that I, too, might have diabetes didn't enter my head, so firm was my belief in my own good health.

After weeks of worsening symptoms, it was the night I got up five times to use the bathroom that finally did it—convinced me that I needed to get this checked out. And so I paid a visit to our student health service.

When I got there, the doctor wasn't in. A receptionist relayed my symptoms to her over the phone. I had my blood drawn. I left a urine sample.

And I went home feeling relieved. I'd taken steps, and now I was on the road to recovery. That's how sure I was that these symptoms were something minor—a trifle curable with a few pills.

So when I returned the next day, still hopeful and calm, the diagnosis—diabetes—delivered by the same receptionist who'd listened to my symptoms the day before, it hit me like a ton of bricks.

Diabetes? Me?

As a physician, I've wrestled with how to choreograph the delivery of a diagnosis. If the patient had an important test scheduled—a CT scan or MRI—we'd schedule an appointment soon afterwards to discuss the results.

But sometimes the results were a surprise—like a blood test revealing diabetes. What then? Give them the diagnosis over the phone? That seemed too impersonal. But scheduling them for an urgent appointment would create anxiety until the appointed hour. What was the right thing to do?

I was inclined toward the second option. I'd ask a staff member to call the patient and let them know that I wanted to discuss a result with them in person. I felt badly about the stress this phone call would cause. At the same time, I hoped that our conversation would temper the bad news, and that they'd leave our face-to-face meeting feeling reassured and cared for.

This month's *More Voices* theme is [Awaiting a Diagnosis](#). What's been your experience of awaiting a significant piece of health news—as a patient, a health professional, a caregiver or a student?

Share your story using the [More Voices Submission Form](#). For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme: [Loss](#).

Remember, your story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you. And thanks for being a part of the *Pulse* community.

Sincerely,

Paul Gross
Editor