

Letter to My Patient

Category: Hands

written by Sunita Sridhar | June 5, 2016

Dear Ms. S,

I'm honored to have known you, I'm glad I had a chance to hold your hand before your surgery, and I will forever remember you as my first patient who passed away.

Within the first few seconds of meeting you, I knew you were a sweet person and had a wonderful, giving soul. I hope you are at peace where you are now. I hope you are no longer suffering.

I wish that I could have helped you more. I wish that I had offered you more compassion in the moments I was with you. I never had an opportunity to tell you how much you meant to me when I met you. I stopped by your room briefly every day after your surgery, until the day you passed away. But something held me back from going into your room and holding your hand again. Maybe it was the ventilator. I couldn't bear to think of you hooked up to all the tubes and wires. I don't think that's what you imagined for yourself. I have thought about you ever since, and I will never forget you.

I learned more about the important moments between a doctor and her patient in the hour I spent with you than I have during my three years of medical school so far. Your hand was the first patient's hand that I ever held, and I wish I had held it longer. You were open with your feelings about your surgery, about how scared you were. I felt ashamed of showing my own emotions and of offering you comfort by holding your hand—but it is what you wanted, and I'm sorry I didn't do more of it.

I hope you are in a better place. May you rest in peace.

Love, Sunita

Sunita Sridhar
Bronx, New York