

Seeing is Believing

Category: The Waiting Room

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | May 2, 2016

For months I spoke, but no one listened. Not my dad's primary care physician. Not the physician's assistant. Not the nurse. I described the "attacks" my ninety-six-year-old dad was experiencing: loss of awareness of his social and physical environments; inability to stand on legs that had turned rubbery; skin that looked pasty and felt sweaty. "Give him orange juice," I was told. "His sugar has probably dropped a bit. And don't worry."

Then, on a Monday morning at 8:30 am, while sitting in the waiting room, waiting for the nurse to call Dad in for his monthly B-12 shot, Dad had an attack.

The two other patients retreated to the corner as the receptionist, secretary, nurse and physician's assistant rushed in to help. One put the blood pressure cuff around his arm, a second held the stethoscope against his chest and a third took blood from his finger. Someone—the secretary?—held me and tried to soothe my hysteria. By the time the physician arrived from his morning rounds, the staff had ordered a wheel chair, alerted the emergency room that Dad was coming, and agreed with me that there was indeed a problem. Dad's blood sugar registered at twenty-six, frighteningly low. Normal is one hundred.

The waiting room trauma led to Dad's admission into the hospital, consultation with an endocrinologist and a diagnosis of insulinoma—a tumor of the pancreas. I learned to test his sugar three times per day, and Dad took medication to keep his sugar closer to the normal range.

No more attacks, no more setting my alarm to feed Dad every two hours throughout the night, no more dismissive conversations from the physician and his staff. All because Dad had the good fortune to have an attack in the waiting room of his doctor's office.

I guess seeing is believing.

Ronna Edelstein

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania