

Understanding B's Pain

Category: In Pain

written by Bernadette Lim | October 22, 2017

B entered the exam room wearing thick-rimmed glasses, tattered pants and a polo shirt. He clutched a duffel bag of clothes in one hand and bags of hot cheetos and ready-to-heat ramen in the other. The physician, an intern, could not speak Mandarin, so a medical translator was used, via phone.

"What brings you here today, B?"

Doctor, I cannot see sometimes, and I have shortness of breath.

"Have you been taking your diabetes medication? Your blood sugar level should not be this high."

I forget.

The intern told B about the consequences of not taking his medication: vision problems, cardiovascular issues and sometimes death.

Moments of silence. Then:

My family has not let me hold my granddaughter in weeks. I don't take my diabetes medication because I don't find a reason to live.

B went on to explain that he had not been able to hold or see his granddaughter, who was born two months ago. A previous diagnosis of cancer had made his family afraid.

I have no reason to live.

B said his family made him to sleep in the hallway of his home and in local homeless shelters. He depended on the microwaves of local churches and business offices, oftentimes re-heating unhealthy, junk food for lunch and dinner. B recalled coming back to an air mattress in a house that was once a home, now to be avoided by his family like an infectious plague. He cried.

Please don't tell my family.

The young physician tried to explain that B's chemotherapy treatment had made the cancer go away, but B was insistent that his doctor not speak to his family.

They will not understand.

The intern called his supervising physician, who insisted that they try to talk with his family. And then the supervisor rushed off to another meeting.

Sensing B's discomfort, the intern held B's hand.

"We don't have to talk to your family this time, but we are here for you. If you need anything, please let us know."

After picking up his duffel bag, B promised to go to the pharmacy, take his diabetes medication, and be at his next appointment three months from now. Then he paused one last time.

□□□□□□*Thank you, doctor.*

*Bernadette Lim
Berkeley, California*