

# Dad

Category: The Phone Call

written by Sara Shields | November 12, 2017

My 72-year-old dad is in neurologic intensive care in a strange hospital in a strange city far from his home and from mine. In the midst of my fully-booked morning of seeing patients, I am trying to reach my diminutive stepmother on the cell phone that she does not know how to program to hear her layperson's interpretation of what the strange doctors are telling her.

Unable to get through to my step-mother, I step into the next exam room to see Mr. P, a 72-year-old man with stable coronary disease and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). He has difficulty hearing and is here with his protective wife for a routine checkup.

I ask the usual questions and then ask him to get up on the exam table. He declines my offer of a paper gown and pulls off his shirt.

As I reach with my stethoscope to listen, the room blurs, and I become the strange doctor in the strange hospital miles away listening to an old man's heart, talking to an old man's tiny wife, distracted by all the other things I have to think about.

And all I can think right now as I pull myself back into this room here and now and refocus, re-listen, re-touch this gentle old man who also somewhere has a daughter who worries about him—all I can think is, all I can hope is, that the doctor touching my dad right now is also pausing to remember that the man he is touching is someone's dad.

*Sara Shields*

*Worcester, Massachusetts*