

# Daily Constitutional

Category: How Can I Help?

written by Blima Marcus | January 6, 2020

Rounds at the cancer institute where I'm a nurse practitioner start at 8:00 am: bellies are pressed, labs frowned at, lungs auscultated, pain discussed. Teams of physicians, nurse practitioners, residents, interns and students roam the halls—teaching, conversing, lecturing, scratching their heads.

But one of my favorite parts of the day starts at 10:00 am. That's when the physical therapists start arriving and the patients start their daily exercise—walking the halls. Some measure their effort in steps, some in laps, some in miles.

They walk in hospital gowns, navy robes, yellow socks. They walk pushing IV poles, with tubes poking out of their gowns. They walk dragging oxygen tanks. They walk with their physical therapists, heads together, arms and hands intertwined for safety.

And they talk. On these 20-minute laps around the halls, patients and therapists talk about things both banal and extraordinary. I hear snippets as they shuffle slowly past me, and warmth spreads within me as I eavesdrop on these human encounters.

"My grandson died in his sleep," an elderly woman says shakily as she shuffles by with a bright pink aluminum walker. "He never made it to the hospital." The therapist—young, her blond ponytail swinging, clad in navy scrubs—stops short. She puts her arms around the woman, rubs her upper back, and says, "I'm so sorry. I lost my grandpa last year."

Then she counsels, "Watch the people in front of you, and angle your walker to the left." And they continue forward. "How old was he?" I hear the therapist ask as they head away.

A young male, nearly seven feet tall, is taking halting steps with his therapist. If not for the three drains emerging from his gown, he would look too healthy to be a patient. He admires his therapist's diamond ring. "I like that diamond shape. I wanted to buy one for my girlfriend but then this happened."

"Buy it," the petite brunette advises, steadying him with her gait belt. "Your girlfriend hasn't left your side in the weeks that you've been here."

"Yeah," he says uncertainly.

An elderly Italian walks by briskly, gowned and robed, nasogastric tube taped to his nose. His therapist eyes him carefully and admonishes him to slow down. "Salmon," the older man declares. "That's what I miss eating."

"I make delicious salmon," says the male physical therapist.

"With butter?" the patient asks suspiciously.

They put their heads together, slow down, and exchange recipes.

The teams keep rounding, stepping carefully out of the way, making room for the pairs of people giving to each other.

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