

# Apprenticeship to Waiting

Category: Finding Balance

written by Ross Carne | March 19, 2026

I write this in a gap in the clinic. My patient, Ms. A, a recurrent non-attender, is running late.

The last time she came, Ms. A sat very still while I watched the tremor in her left hand. "Is it Parkinson's?" she asked, before we had really begun.

Now, I wait for her return, for her test results, for her disease to reveal itself. In neurology it sometimes feels as though I am in apprenticeship to waiting, learning its rhythms from the patients I see.

There are the obvious waits: for appointments; for results; for the patient whose illness slows their movements while they search for a referral letter or take time to undress for the couch. Waiting tilts every encounter slightly off balance, edging toward resolution.

I recall many other kinds of waiting my patients tell me about.

The young teacher has been spending time each morning on his nature strip, waiting for his colleague to give him a lift to work. And for his second seizure.

The retired lawyer who pauses over a once familiar name. Surely that hesitation was not there yesterday.

The accountant says that as she scrolled through her spreadsheet, her vision felt almost back to normal. But there was a tingling in her thigh. Was it real? New? Important? Sitting in my office, she rubs it again and again.

"The tumor is pressing on the area that controls my hand," a patient tells me. "They say I have three months." His left hand moves to cradle his right.

"I can still remember diving off the pier. For a moment today I was sure I could shrug my left shoulder. Let me try." His gaze turns inward. The room holds its breath.

At mothers' group, the young mother watches her son so closely, wondering if he will ever speak.

My patient tells me he plans to send the letter. I imagine him as he sits at his kitchen table. His left hand can still press to seal the envelope. He presses carefully: Motor Neuron Disease Research Foundation.

Waiting is not always the right word. These are cadences of teetering, of balancing: in the space before the next seizure, the months before a word, the pause before a diagnosis, the narrowing margin of muscle and time. Between hope and fear, knowledge and uncertainty, tremor and steadiness.

Balance lives in the small adjustments—one hand cradling another, the breath before speaking, the careful pressure sealing an envelope.

Ms. A still has not arrived. For a moment, the clinic is quiet. I lean sideways into my own waiting.

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