

A Letter to M

Shifa Gandhi, MD

Alone and on call as an intern.

The text came in at 6:45- an admission.

I didn't even have a chance to sit down and start the mechanical morning routine of chart checking.

I felt slightly comforted? in knowing that the pulmonary fellow had already laid eyes on you.

I decided to see you first, and then round on the old folks.

You were asleep when I walked into the ED.

It took a great deal to wake you up.

You looked at me and I saw the distress. The difficulty breathing. It pained me.

I called out "M". You squeezed my hand in response.

I left your room, slightly uneasy.

Your Parkinson's was so advanced that you could not clear your secretions. I knew if you got on the vent, you probably were not coming off of it.

I did all I could do to prevent it.

I ran to your room every hour: when your breathing became faster, when you became more confused.

I was the one who had the conversation with your daughter about the potential intubation, that there may be a chance once you were on the vent you would not be able to come off of it.

I remember her tears.

I remember her fear.

I remember that feeling of helplessness because I felt it too.

I left.

The next day you were in the ICU, M.

I couldn't save you.

In your eyes I saw pain and fear.

I couldn't heal you.

I'm sorry.