

Illustration by Steve Derrick

The little indignities

Wizened, calling out "Somebody help?" but not your Patient, so you don't.

It's clear she's on the Commode but you talk fast and Pretend not to see.

He's in the bathroom, But you're running late so you Just chat through the door.

His wife is coming Back later; you promise to Be there, but forget. She speaks no English, So you smile, give a thumbs-up. Did she have questions?

Lunch tray arrives, but He's too weak and it's too far; You don't stay to help.

Why? Sometimes sicker Patients need you; sometimes you're Just hungry for lunch.

The little indignities Accumulate, a weight you Can't (shouldn't) shrug off. You balance your saves Against these slights, unsure where The tipping point lies.

Yes, you're a doctor, But you're also human, and There's no cure for that.

-Michelle M. Kittleson, MD, PhD

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