

Poetry on Scientific Communication

Telling the Family: Pre- and Postop

Mary E Knatterud

*HIS DOCTOR'S FIRST WORDS
FOUND PEN
BY PHONE
SHAKEN SCRIBBLES*

[a panicky, reeling niece,
I don't know what it really means;
a medical editor,
I *do* know where to look it up:
not that *Dorland's* helps tonight
shedding prosy light
fueling human fright]

surgery Monday
mass in intestine
bowel obstruction
delirious
5 days constipation
CT scan: lesion at hepatic flexure
[where his liver bends]
diverticular mass
[Latin "turn aside"
circumscribed pouch or sac
written around?
no, "bounded," "confined to a limited space"]
no fever
NG suction
INR
[international normalized ratio
of what to what
so what
what's normal]
warfarin
[Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation
anticoagulant, fatal in mammals if large enough dose
Coumadin the one that's capped
trademark for warfarin sodium]
not eating
CT head
more and more confused
haloperitol
[no, d: haloperidol, antipsychotic
with antiemetic,
against vomiting, who isn't,
hypotensive, hypothermic effects]
fell
laparotomy
[did he say laparoscopy]

couldn't have
 -tomy is to cut
 -scopy just to see
lapara flank in Greek
 or loin, lumbus, the back between the thorax and pelvis
 or just abdomen in general
 where's the flank exactly again?
 the side, inferior to the ribs, superior to the ilium
 os ilium
 not ileum with an e, as in distal small bowel
 oh a bone, the "expansive superior portion of the os coxae (hip bone);
 it is a separate bone in early life"
 where was I
 where's my uncle
 not so early in life
 OK, abdominal cutting
 major surgery,
 OK, will he be OK?
 wife's cousin? one of our residents at the U?

HIS SURGEON'S FIRST WORDS

NO PEN

IN PERSON

SHAKING CLARITY

This man has a problem
 carcinoma
 inoperable
 I couldn't get
 it all

[I wish I needed *Dorland's* now
 these words
 few and plain
 face to face
 I get it all
 too well]

Note from the editor of Science Editor: Submission of the poem above inspired the establishment of a poetry column in Science Editor, with Mary E Knatterud as its editor. For further information, please see page 125.