
POETRY | SPRING 2021

primum non nocere

By Nina Solis

Four walls, one window,
her, and I make small
talk while she is assessed

*Pt presents with mouth
sores, b/l UE + LE bruising,
hx of Breast CA*

I see: swollen, bloody
gums of unknown cause

*Impaired oral mucous
membranes, swollen arm
r/t Hx of mastectomy c lymph
node removal 2/2 breast CA,
no family members present
yet Risk for altered family
process, half-shut eyes
behind thin glasses Readiness
for Enhanced self-control*

She tells me that she's
from the south, but lived
abroad for many years;
I ask her why and she
says, "Just because"

*Readiness for
Enhanced Wellbeing*

She tells me about her
career, about her love
of fashion, about being
angry at a friend for
not returning borrowed
designer clothes *Risk for
ineffective relationship*

She tells me of her nephew,
how she makes his favorite
food after school, how he

comes running to her
*Readiness for Enhanced
Hope*

She tells me that she is tired
of waiting for an answer,
of being in this bed
Fatigue

She tells me about her battle
with breast cancer years ago -
how radiation blistered and
scarred her skin, *Risk for
impaired skin integrity* how
chemo made her hair fall out,
*Risk for situational low self-
esteem* how her nephew was
worried, *Interrupted family
process* how he thought
his aunt would die *Risk for
stress overload*

She apologizes
because she has
to stop talking -
“The pain,” *acute*,
9/10 she says,
pointing to her mouth,
“is just too much”

A group of white
coats and tired
faces come in
with a knock,
without warning
Impaired Comfort

He, with the glasses,
he, with stern face
and awkward arms,
stands, considers
sitting, continues
standing, rests his
hand on her shoulder
*Ineffective Activity
Planning*

“We reviewed your bloodwork,”
CBC w/ diff He looks down
toward the floor, then back up,
Deficient diversional activity
“evaluated your symptoms,”
one resident behind him nods
in agreeance Delayed healing
r/t WBC count, “and it seems
to us,” the team stands together
in silence Moral distress,
“that you probably have leukemia.”
2/2 prior radiation and
adjuvant chemo

Her face changes
from furrowed brow,
lips pressed together,
still, Ineffective
denial to a flash of
darkness in her eyes,
features sinking down
like a rock in water,
Fear to mouth open
wide, breathless, then
once again unmoving
Stress Overload

She says, “My nephew
won’t be happy to hear this”
Risk for Disabled
Family Coping

After a few more words,
the team departs, and I
am left alone with her.
Disturbed Energy Field

The room grows heavy
and silent as I kneel down
beside her, take her hand
in mine Impaired verbal
communication, Deficient
knowledge, Hopelessness.

Nina Solis is a Hematology/Oncology and COVID-19 RN and emerging writer based in Philadelphia, PA. She received her BSN with a minor in Creative Writing from the University of Pennsylvania as a proud first-generation college graduate. Currently she enjoys running, playing guitar, and genuine human connection (at least 6-feet apart). Find her on Twitter and Instagram @bean_solis

© 2020 *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*