The Exception to a Rule

“The natural anxiety, the solitude which the physician experiences at the sickness of a wife, a child, or any one who by ties of consanguinity is rendered peculiarly dear to him, tend to obscure his judgment, and produce timidity and irresolution in his practice.”

“You'll assist, won't you?” the surgeon, with whom I had worked for years, asked me. Well...yes..., I assisted with all my patients who needed surgery, but this time? In my own practice, I had witnessed the tragic consequences of physicians treating members of their family. The wife of an orthopedist came to see me with extensive hair loss, looking like a blimp. She had every other known side effect of prolonged use of high-dose cortisone, which had been supplied to her from her husband's sample closet to treat her severe asthma.

A young colleague of mine prescribed narcotics for his wife's migraines and caused her to become an addict. Another doctor, who could not resist his husband's sample closet to treat her severe asthma. He had worked for years, asked me. Well...yes..., I assisted with all my patients who needed surgery, but this time?

When I visited Eva in the intensive care unit, she asked me whether we had been able to do anything. I was really angry and hurled my gown into the hamper rather than tossing it as I usually did. I slammed the locker door shut before I got a-hold of myself and remembered that anger is one of the prominent reactions to grief and loss. I was no longer able to concentrate on what we were doing and the shaking stopped. When we saw the size and extent of the tumor, there was no question of resectability. A tear ran down my cheek into my mask, but the shaking stopped. When we saw the size and extent of the tumor, there was no question of resectability.

After the surgery, not cared for her but admitted her to a nursing home? I think not. Because of Eva's overwhelming need for control and independence, she would have been unable to fit into the compliant, passive role expected of a patient.

Should I have done things differently, not assisted at her surgery, not cared for her but admitted her to a nursing home? I think not. Because of Eva's overwhelming need for control and independence, she would have been unable to fit into the compliant, passive role expected of a patient.

A stranger would have found it very difficult to extend to her the understanding and compassionate care which she sought as her life came to an end. My rule not to care for relatives, as all rules, has exceptions. Caring for Eva was an exception.

References