pH Meter

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Artist's Statement

This poem, which refers to a colleague's suicide after struggling with terminal illness, took years to write. Emotions of guilt, anger, and doubt were only a few of the elements contributing to the delay. We have the obvious need for eliminating barriers that prevent individuals (practitioners in particular) from reaching out for help. However, when approaching a topic such as this, we must also keep in mind what Gillon referred to as "attention to scope" [1]. Despite the continued relevance of beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice within Beauchamp and Childress's four principles model of medical ethics [2], it can be argued that "autonomy" is paramount in patient-centered medicine and end of life matters. I believe there could have been a more caring, comforting, and respectful venue and choice for my colleague's final act. It is hoped that this poem will contribute to professional and societal discourse on the issue.

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Among life's
acids and bases, you,
my physician colleague
could not find
balance; a solution
other than isolation,
suffering in silence
and dying by your own hand
alone in a field.

Imagine
A litmus test
Of soothing, neutralizing balm
To counter the
Unbuffered salts in this
Wound of life.

Relief—
From the burden of:
Hidden fears and wishes;
Protracted discomfort;
Medical futility;
Sanctimonious tripe.

Imagine.
Societal chemistry—
A dialogue of choice including
Non-violent departure
Discussed and supported;
Surrounded by friends and family.

Imagine.

References

1. Gillon R. Medical ethics: four principles plus attention to scope. *BMJ*. 1994;309:184.
2. Beauchamp T, Childress J. Principles of biomedical ethics. 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2012.

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