
HEALING ARTS

Materia Medica

Life Expectancy

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Rising mortality and morbidity in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century
www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1518393112

It used to be that even the poor and desperate
would live longer and better
in what would always be the richest country.
It used to be we'd have a pill for everything,
something at least to take the edge off,
something we wouldn't spend the whole visit talking about,
the 20 minute visit they've driven hours to be late to.

That royal *we*? Just me, midlife, white, non-Hispanic too,
but more late midlife than they are,
more middle class too
and running a little late myself
while noticing more and more
that moment we're supposed to stay in
is running slower and slower.

They are a couple and to prove it,
her name matches the name tattooed on his neck.
I had to ask. He's looking out the window,
having lost our staring contest.
It's a good time to change the subject
to something everyone can live with.
Flu shots? I wasn't trying to be funny
but I'm grateful for a smile, the smile
slow learners earn. How many times
does he have to explain
that the last time he got the shot, he got the flu.
The funny thing is: me too.
Not the real flu, but flu-ish, aches and chills
just like it was for him.
We take a moment to be victims together.
He can owe me
the random urine sample.

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J Gen Intern Med 31(8):973
DOI: 10.1007/s11606-016-3688-0
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Published online April 12, 2016